

MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

PAYOUT IN BLOOD

A Brand New MIKE SHAYNE

Short Novel

New Novelets by
JAMES REASONER and
PATRICK SCAFFETTI

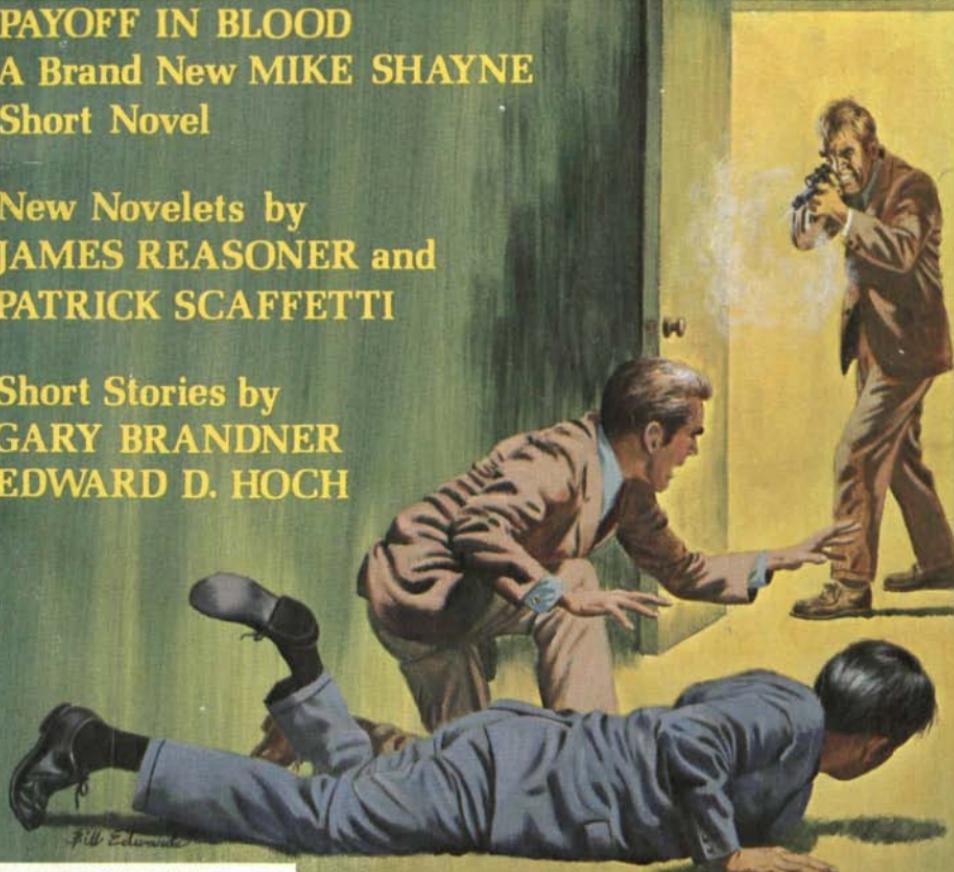
Short Stories by
GARY BRANDNER
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MARCH 1980

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MIKE SHAYNE

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MARCH 1980
VOL. 44 NO. 3
ISSN 0026-3621

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

PAYOUT IN BLOOD

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Thugs beat up Tim Rourke and kidnapped his girl friend — but that was just the beginning. When Mike Shayne offered to help, the big redheaded detective was plunged into a bloody web of violence that might cost him his life!.....5

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS

JAMES REASONER has been in our pages quite frequently — and with good reason: he writes good stories. In response to a request for some autobiographical material, he wrote:

I'm a native Texan, born in Fort Worth in 1953. My first sale was in 1976; my first mystery was "Comingor" in the August 1977 MSMM. Like most writers I've had a variety of jobs, including library worker, book salesman, manager of a TV repair shop, newspaper columnist, and film critic. My wife Livia, who is as lovely as her name, and I live with our five cats in a house we built ourselves. MANOR BOOKS just accepted my first novel, TEXAS WIND, a private eye novel set in my own area of Fort Worth.

RICHARD LAYMON appears here for the first time. He says:

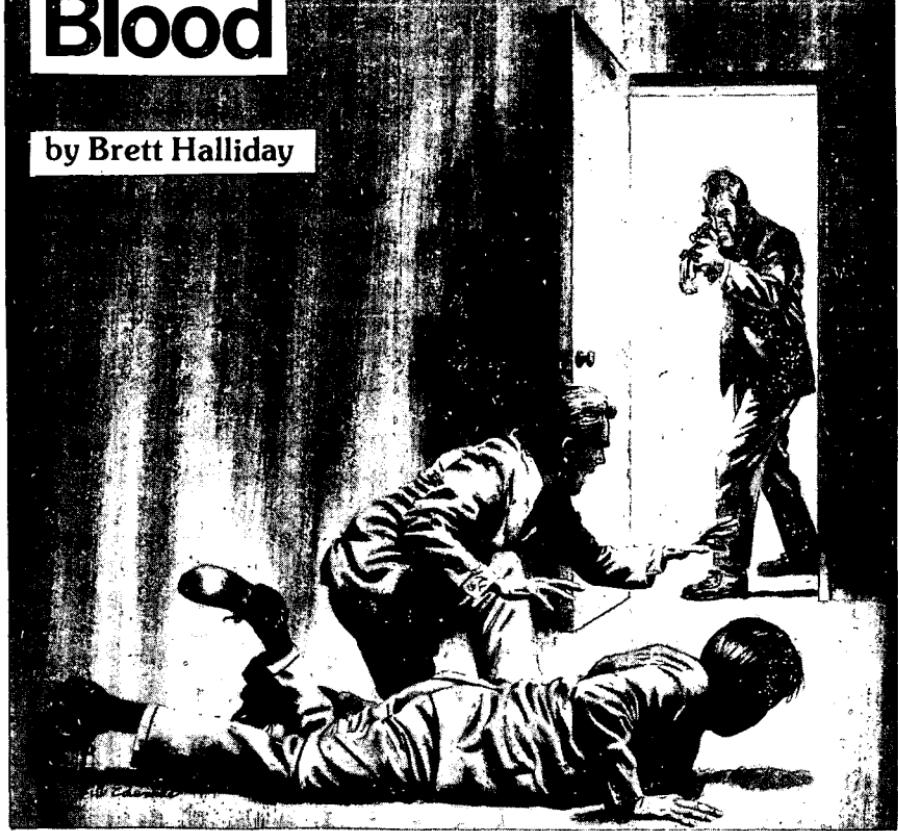
I'm 32, B.A. in English from Willamette University in Salem, Oregon. M.A. from Loyola University of L.A. My preference, in reading and writing, is frightening stuff — of which "Stiff Intruders" isn't an example. Favorite authors are Stephen King, William Goldman, William Hope Hodgson, Poe, Davis Grubb, for starters. My first novel, THE CELLAR, appeared in January. Three more horror novels of mine will be published by Warner Books. I have a wife (Ann) and a baby girl (Kelly). For local color, you might mention my two-year stint as MWA bartender. That was another highlight of my career.

We've published a number of stories by DICK STODGHILL, and now at last we meet him in person in MSMMakers:

continued on page 70

Payoff In Blood

by Brett Halliday



Shayne looked up to see the third man standing in the doorway, the highpowered rifle in his hands lined up squarely on the detective's forehead. At that range, a rifle slug wouldn't leave enough of his face to identify!



MIKE SHAYNE WAS SLEEPING the sleep of the just — a deep, sound, restful sleep that washed away the strains and tensions of the day. He was sprawled on the bed in his apartment, his big rangy body moving only occasionally, the low hum of the air conditioner drowning out any noise that might come in from the night.

It took a long time for the tapping to wake him.

It wasn't much of a noise, a feeble knocking on the door of his apartment that was barely audible in the bedroom. Shayne's ears had become highly developed over the course of the years, though, and the sound finally penetrated to his sleep-logged brain.

He may have been sound asleep, but when he woke up, he woke up all the way. His gray eyes snapped open. With a lithe motion, he swung his legs off the bed and stood up, moving into the living room quickly.

The tapping was coming from the front door, all right, but it didn't sound like the knock of a well man. The red hair on the back of Shayne's neck prickled. He hadn't survived for years as a private detective by being careless. He ducked back into the bedroom and returned gripping his .38.

Staying to one side of the door, Shayne called out in a low voice, "Who is it?"

The answer was a low mumble

that he couldn't understand. There was something familiar about it, though. Again, Shayne asked, "Who is it? What do you want?"

"... s'me, Mike ... Lemme in ..."

This time Shayne recognized the voice. He unlocked the door quickly and swung it open, ready to catch the man outside should he fall. He hadn't sounded like he was in very good shape.

He wasn't. The man who half-way fell through the door was tall and lean and, at the moment, extremely bloody. Shayne grasped his arm and exclaimed, "Good Lord, Tim, what happened to you?"

Timothy Rourke, reporter for the Miami *Daily News* and long-time best friend of the big detective, staggered into Shayne's apartment and said, "Need help, Mike ... Need help bad..."

His mouth set in a tight line, Shayne steered his friend over to the sofa and sat him down. When he had first recognized the voice outside the door, Shayne had thought that Rourke was drunk. That obviously wasn't the case, though. He had been worked over, but good, by somebody who knew what they were doing.

"Just take it easy, Tim," Shayne said. "We'll get you fixed up."

Rourke leaned back on the sofa while Shayne went to the liquor cabinet and poured a stiff shot.

He helped the reporter hold the glass as he lifted it to bruised lips.

Rourke winced as he drank, but he got most of the liquor down. Then he took a deep breath and said in a stronger voice, "Thanks, Mike. You're a lifesaver."

Shayne turned on a lamp, then used its lights to survey the extent of the damage to the newsman. There was a good-sized gash on his forehead that had produced most of the blood, and there were smaller cuts and bruises on the rest of his face. Shayne could tell by the way Rourke ws holding his body that there were a lot of sore muscles and bones in there. Whoever had jumped him had given him a terrific beating, and the detective could feel anger boiling up inside him, all thoughts of his interrupted sleep gone.

"Who did this to you, Tim?" he grated.

Rourke shook his head slowly, as if trying not to dislodge it from a precarious perch. "Don't know," he answered. "Two guys, two big guys." Suddenly, Rourke's arm lashed out and his bony fingers clawed into Shayne's arm. "They took Marcy, Mike! We've got to do something!"

Shayne put a hand on Rourke's shoulder as he tried to stand up and held him down. "Take it easy," he ordered. "You're in no shape to be jumping around. Just tell me what happened."

"But they took Marcy! We gotta

call the cops! We gotta — ”

Shayne tightened his grip on Rourke's shoulder and said in a low voice, “Easy, Tim! You're the best damn reporter in this town, man, so just give me the facts.”

Rourke settled back on the sofa and took a deep breath. “You're right,” he said slowly. “Getting hysterical won't help Marcy.”

“That's Marcy Holman, right?”

“Who else?”

Who else indeed? Shayne knew that lately Rourke had been dating Marcy Holman almost every night, showing more interest in her than he had in any girl in a long time. Shayne had never met her, but he had heard a lot about her, from Rourke and other sources.

Marcy was twenty years old and beautiful, a willowy blonde of the type in which Rourke specialized. Shayne had seen her picture in the paper more than once, and he knew what a lovely girl she was.

She was also rich, the child of somebody that Shayne couldn't place right off the top of his head. And she was a world-class athlete, a swimmer who was a good bet to be on the next Olympic team. It wasn't hard to see why Rourke had fallen for her.

Now, according to Rourke, someone had taken her someplace, and Shayne didn't like the sound of that.

Rourke was continuing his story. “We were up at a place called Eureka's, a bar north of

town. I guess you could say we were slumming.”

Shayne nodded. He had heard of Eureka's and knew it to be a rough place.

“I know I shouldn't have taken Marcy there,” Rourke said, “but I didn't think about anything happening. We had a few drinks and then decided to leave, but when we got out into the parking lot, a couple of guys jumped us.”

“Had you gotten into any arguments with anybody inside the bar?”

“No, Mike, it was a complete surprise. I wasn't expecting any trouble. I tried to fight the guys, but hell, you know that's not my line. One of them got behind me and wrapped me up, then the other one started pounding on me. Marcy tried to help me, but there wasn't much she could do.”

“Did either of you call for help?”

“What good would it have done? The music is so loud in that joint that you can't even hear yourself think once you're inside.”

Shayne refilled Rourke's glass, said, “What happened after they worked you over?”

“I was yelling at Marcy to run, to get out of there, but just as she started to, they let me go and grabbed her. One of them came back long enough to give me a boot in the head and do this — ” He pointed at the gash. “ — and then they started dragging Marcy away. I tried to get up and go after

them, Mike, but I just couldn't. My muscles wouldn't work. I heard them putting her in a car, then one of them came over to me again and picked me up. I remember being tossed into some bushes behind the parking lot, and I guess I blacked out after that. When I came to, I found my car and made it over here. Don't ask me how."

Shayne lit a cigarette and studied the wound on his friend's forehead. "Looks like you're going to need stitches to close that up," he grunted. "I'd better get you over to the emergency room."

Rourke sat up suddenly on the sofa and said, "But what about Marcy? She's been kidnapped, Mike, we've got to do something."

"You won't be doing Marcy any good if you bleed to death," Shayne pointed out bluntly. "The best thing for us to do right now is call the cops and get them to work on this."

"Cops! Mike, she's been kidnapped! You know how the police can spook kidnappers. It's too dangerous to call them in on it."

"You know better, Tim. It's the cops' job to handle things like this."

Shayne reached for the phone, but Rourke swayed up from his seat on the sofa and clutched the redhead's brawny arm. "Don't do it yet, Mike," he pleaded. "Shouldn't we at least wait to see if there's a ransom demand?"

Shayne took his hand away from the phone and used it to tug on the lobe of his left ear. After a moment, he said, "I suppose you could be right. Let's go get that cut sewed up."

Shayne dressed rapidly, while Rourke took a third drink. The lanky reporter was a lot steadier on his feet now, but Shayne knew that the strength was artificially induced and would fade before long.

He came out of the bedroom buttoning his shirt and said to Rourke, "Come on, Tim."

The telephone rang before they got to the door.

Shayne scooped it up, said, "Yeah?"

A man's voice said, "Is this Mike Shayne?"

"That's right."

"My name is Gerard Holman, Mr. Shayne. My daughter has been kidnapped."

SHAYNE'S FINGERS tightened on the receiver. He motioned for Rourke to come closer and said, "Go on, Mr. Holman, I'm listening."

"I just received a call from someone who claims to be holding my daughter Marcy. They want \$250,000 to release her unharmed."

"Have you called the police?"

"They said they would kill Marcy if I told anyone." Holman's voice got tighter. "I know it's a

risk even calling you, Mr. Shayne, but I need help."

Shayne had angled the receiver away from his ear so that Rourke could hear, too. He asked, "Why did you call me, Mr. Holman?"

"My daughter was out with a man named Timothy Rourke tonight. I believe he's a friend of yours. That's how I happened to think of you. I know your reputation for handling things like this."

Shayne rasped the thumb of his free hand along his jawline, said, "Tim Rourke is a friend of mine; and he's here right now. He's already told me what happened. Two men abducted your daughter tonight while she and Tim were on their date. They beat Tim up pretty bad."

"Oh, my Lord." Holman's voice was low and desperate. "Can you come up here, Shayne? I don't dare call the police, but perhaps you can help me get my daughter back."

"We're on our way," Shayne said. "We've got to stop off at the hospital and get Tim patched up, but it shouldn't take long. Just stay calm until we get there. I'm sure everything will be all right."

Shayne wasn't at all sure of that, but there was no point in worrying Gerard Holman even more. After a second's pause, Holman said, "Please hurry."

Shayne cradled the phone, said, "Come on," but Rourke was already heading for the door.

As they rode down to the street in the elevator, Rourke said, "The Holman place is about an hour's drive north of here, Mike. Let's forget about the emergency room and head straight there, okay?"

"Not okay. I may need you tonight, Tim, and I want you to be in the best shape possible under the circumstances."

Rourke continued to grumble about the delay and agonize over Marcy as Shayne bundled him into the big Buick and headed for a nearby hospital. He only shut up when they entered the emergency room.

A young intern took five quick stitches to close up the gash on Rourke's head and cleaned up the other wounds before shooting the reporter with antibiotics and advising him to check into the hospital for X-rays and tests. Shayne stood off to one side, lit a cigarette, and then extinguished it at a look from a stern-faced nurse.

"No hospital," Rourke said adamantly. "I've got things to do."

"It's your funeral," the intern shrugged. "If that headache of yours doesn't go away, though, you can be pretty sure you've got a concussion."

Rourke brushed the warning off and strode out of the room. Shayne shook hands with the intern and said, "Thanks. Tim's not always

this rude. He's just got a lot on his mind."

"It's okay. You're Mike Shayne, aren't you?"

"That's right."

"A friend of mine fixed up a bullet wound for you last year."

Shayne's rugged face creased in a grin. "I do seem to provide a lot of work for cops and doctors. Send the bill for this tonight to my office, okay?"

"Sure."

Shayne nodded to the doctor amiably and went out into the night, following Tim Rourke. Rourke was already back in Shayne's Buick, ready to go.

"Sure you wouldn't rather go back to your apartment and get some sleep?" Shayne asked.

"Are you kidding? Let's get going, Mike. I'll tell you how to get to Sandy Point."

Shayne started the car and wheeled out onto the street. "Sandy Point?"

"Gerard Holman's estate. It's quite a place, Mike. Sits out on a point of land that juts out into the ocean. When the tide is real high, it comes over the road and the place becomes the next thing to an island..."

Shayne drove with an unhurried efficiency that covered ground with deceptive speed. He said, "Tell me more about what happened. Did you get a good look at the two men who jumped you?"

"Not real good. Eureka's doesn't believe in spending money

on frills, like parking-lot lights. I think I'd recognize them if I saw them again, though."

"Did they say anything to you?"

"Not a word. They were pros, Mike, just interested in doing the job."

"What about this Gerard Holman? Can he afford two hundred and fifty grand for the ransom?"

Rourke got a battered pack of cigarettes out of his coat pocket and lit one, inhaling deeply. He said, "I imagine he can raise it. He's worth a lot of money."

"Why is his name vaguely familiar to me?"

"You've probably seen it in the paper. He's a painter, Mike, and not of the house variety. He's done portraits of presidents, and his work is in museums all over. He's a real nice guy, even if he's not too sure about his daughter dating a newspaperman."

Rourke's face fell as his words reminded him of Marcy, and Shayne asked hurriedly, "What about the rest of the Holmans, if there are anymore?"

"Oh, yeah, there's several more. Marcy has two brothers, a sister-in-law, and a cousin living at Sandy Point."

"What about her mother?"

"She died when Marcy was eight. You want a rundown on the other members of the family?"

"I like to know what I'm getting into and who I'll be meeting."

"Right. I told you about Gerard. Marcy's brothers are David and Jason. David's married to a woman named Carolyn, and Marcy's cousin is named Barbara Masters."

Shayne filed the names away in his brain and waited for Rourke to go on. He wanted to keep Rourke talking so that he wouldn't have as much time to think and worry.

"Gerard's painting is kind of a family business, I guess you could say," Rourke went on. "He's invested most of his money, and Jason handles all of that end. David is sort of a personal manager, a liaison between Gerard and the museums and art societies and such. And Barbara is in charge of housekeeping at Sandy Point."

"How did you manage to land in such a hotbed of culture?" Shayne asked, a hint of a grin on his face:

"Pure luck. One of the sports guys from the paper was going to interview Marcy and asked me if I'd like to go along. You know me, Mike; football's the only sport I follow. But let me tell you, once I saw Marcy, I took a sudden interest in swimming."

"She's not mixed up with her father's artwork?"

Rourke shook his head. "Not Marcy. She's a little bit of a rebel, Mike. I think that makes her father love her that much more."

They had left the light of Miami behind and were speeding north-

ward. Rourke fell silent and turned his head to stare at the blackness flying by outside, and Shayne kept his eyes on the road, his keen mind turning the situation over inside his head.

Shayne hated kidnapping almost as much as he hated murder. It made for a situation where every move is risky, and there was no clear-cut proper path to follow. Whatever you did, it could go wrong easier than it could go right. Even though he had suggested calling the police to Rourke, he wasn't sure that it was the best thing to do. Especially now that Holman had received a ransom demand.

He could guess what Holman wanted him to do. No doubt the kidnappers had given him instructions for some kind of a money drop, and Holman would want Shayne to be the go-between. It wouldn't be the first time the big redhead had acted as a courier in such a situation. It was the kind of job he had never liked, though. Too many times, even if the kidnappers' demands were followed to the letter, the victim would wind up dead. There was no way a corpse could point an accusing finger later on in the event of the kidnappers' capture.

Shayne's lips quirked in a grimace. Thoughts like that wouldn't do anybody any good. Right now, all he could do was get on with it and do his best for

Marcy, and for Tim.

As if he had been mind-reading, Rourke asked, "What do you think's going to happen, Mike?"

"I imagine Holman will want to pay the ransom," Shayne answered. "I got the feeling he wanted me to deliver it. Whoever pulled the snatch probably gave him instructions on where and how to deliver it."

"I'd like to be the one to handle it," Rourke said in a low voice. "I'd like to get my hands on whoever picks it up."

"That's the reason I'd better do it. You've covered enough kidnappings, Tim. You know that the victim has a lot better chance if everybody keeps a cool head."

"Yeah ... You're right. I know that, Mike, but it doesn't make it any easier." Rourke was silent for a moment, then he said, "I don't care how it comes out, Mike, whether we get Marcy back safely or not, I want you to track down the bastards who did this. I want you to nail them. There's a whole lot more than a story for the paper riding on this one. A whole hell of a lot more ..." His voice trailed off softly.

Shayne stared at the cones of light thrown by the Buick's headlights. It had been a long time since he had seen Rourke so broken up over anything. His mouth tightened into a taut line.

"I'll find them, Tim," he promised. "Whoever they are,

they'll wish they had never hatched this scheme."

"Mike ... Thanks."

They were silent then as Shayne drove the car on toward Sandy Point. They had been on the road for nearly an hour, and Shayne thought they should be getting there shortly.

It was another ten minutes before Rourke said suddenly, "The turn-off is right up here, Mike. Take a right just over the top of that little hill."

The Buick topped the rise and Shayne applied the brakes. An unmarked paved road turned off the highway at a forty-five degree angle, and the Buick took the curve easily. Shayne dropped the speed down further as the road began to wind down toward the sea.

As they came around a bend, Rourke said, "There it is."

III

IT HAD BEEN A HELL of a long time since Shayne had heard anything described as being *storybook*, but that was the best word for the big house on Sandy Point Peninsula. It was more like the Brothers Grimm than Mother Goose, though.

Every light in the house seemed to be on, and the illumination gave Shayne a good view of the place. It was three stories tall and ugly as sin, a weird conglomeration of shapes and angles

that told Shayne immediately that it had once been a small house and had grown in stages, being added onto with little regard for what had been done before. Shayne almost found himself looking for turrets and a moat.

There were none, though, just the winding road that curved up in front of the house. As they started out onto the peninsula, Shayne could see the water coming in on both sides of them. This looked like a bad place to be in stormy weather.

Shayne brought the Buick to a stop in front of the house. Tim Rourke was out of the car and heading for the house before Shayne even got his door open. Rourke didn't knock as he burst through the heavy wooden entrance. Shayne followed close on his heels.

The inside of the big house was a lot more attractive than the outside. Shayne glanced around at the thick carpet and elegant furnishings, then caught up with Rourke and put a big hand on the reporter's arm.

"I thought you said this guy was an artist," Shayne said. "How come the outside of this place looks like something out of a bad horror movie?"

"I said he was a painter, not an architect," Rourke replied. "Anyway, the house looked like this when he bought it. You can blame the grotesqueries on the previous tenants."

"Must have been a fun group," Shayne muttered. "From the outside, this looks like a good place for a human sacrifice."

Rourke wasn't paying any attention. He was striding down the hall toward a door at the end. He didn't knock on this one, either.

As the newsman pushed through the door, Shayne heard a voice exclaim from the room beyond, "Rourke! Is Shayne with you?"

"Right here," Shayne said, stepping into the room behind Rourke. "You must be Holman."

They were in a book-lined study, and behind a big mahogany desk was a thick-bodied man with white hair and a craggy, florid face. Shayne couldn't tell if the flush was from drinking or was the man's natural coloring.

"I'm Gerard Holman," the man said, standing up and extending a large hand to Shayne. The fingers were long but blunt, not looking like Shayne would have visualized the hands of a painter.

The redhead returned the firm handshake and said, "Mike Shayne. Glad to meet you, Holman. Wish it had been under better circumstances."

Holman sighed. "Yes ... I've heard a great deal about you, Mr Shayne. Why don't you and Rourke have a seat?"

Holman sat down behind his desk again, while Shayne and

Rourke took comfortable arm-chairs.

Shayne got right to the point. "Tell us about the ransom demand, Mr. Holman."

Holman took a deep breath. "As I said, it came by telephone. The phone rang about twelve-thirty. I was still up, reading. When I answered, a man's voice asked, 'Is this Gerard Holman?' I said that it was, and he said, 'We have your daughter Marcy, Mr. Holman. If you want her back alive, leave \$250,000 in small bills under the Copperhead Bay Bridge at dawn. Don't call the cops, or you'll get Marcy back in pieces.'" A visible shudder ran through Holman's big body. "He said it very fast, like he had rehearsed it, but he was perfectly understandable. I was stunned, naturally, but I started to ask him questions anyway. He hung up. I knew that Marcy was supposed to be out with you tonight, Rourke, so I thought of your friend Shayne and called him."

"You did the right thing," Rourke said. "Mike will get Marcy back if anyone can."

Shayne was pulling on his ear-lobe. "What about the man's voice?" he asked. "Anything distinctive about it?"

"Nothing. I think he was trying to keep it that way."

"How about background noises?"

"There was nothing that I could hear."

"Where's this Copperhead Bay Bridge?"

"Two miles north of here," Holman answered. "It's where the highway crosses the mouth of Copperhead Bay. I think the kidnapper meant for the money to be left under the south end, because the bridge goes over a little beach there. There's nothing but water under the north end."

"All right," Shayne said. "Now it's time for the important questions. Do you have \$250,000?"

Holman nodded. "I keep some money here, but not nearly that much, of course. I've sent my son Jason into Miami to roust out my bankers. He'll bring the rest back with him."

"You intend to pay the ransom, then?"

"I have no choice, Mr. Shayne. I love my daughter." Shayne thought for a second that Holman's composure was going to crack, but the artist controlled himself. "I have to do whatever they tell me to."

"And you want me to deliver the money?"

"That's right. I want someone competent handling this, Mr. Shayne."

"What about you or your sons?"

Holman smiled grimly. "I'm an old man, Mr. Shayne, and my sons ... Well, they're good at what they do, I suppose, but dealing with kidnappers isn't in their line."

Shayne lit a cigarette, con-

sidered a moment, then said, "I'll do it, of course, but I've got the feeling that something isn't right about this, Holman."

"What do you mean, Mike?" Rourke asked.

"I don't know. Just a feeling." Shayne glanced at his watch. It was nearly two-thirty in the morning. "Dawn's a good four hours off," he said. "I'd like to do some poking around before the ransom drop."

Rourke and Holman both frowned. "What do you mean?" the painter asked.

"For one thing, I'd like to go back to the bar where Tim and Marcy were jumped and find out if anybody saw anything that could help us. Maybe I can get a line on the kidnappers and find Marcy before dawn. I could save you \$250,000, Mr. Holman."

Holman slashed the air with his hands. "I don't care about the money! You have to understand that, Shayne. I just want my daughter back, and if you stir things up, you may get her killed."

Shayne's face hardened, and his gray eyes went slightly chilly. "It's the only way I'll take the job," he said flatly. "I won't do anything to jeopardize Marcy, you can count on that."

Shayne saw that Rourke's face was a jumble of strained emotions. He felt bad for his friend, and he wasn't just about to let the kidnappers get away with the pain

and worry they had caused. He owed Tim that much for the years of friendship, and Holman evidently saw the determination on the detective's roughhewn face.

"All right, Mr. Shayne," Holman said. "I'm putting it in your hands. I'll have the money here and ready to go by six o'clock."

"I'll be here," Shayne grunted. "You coming with me now, Tim?"

"Huh? Oh, sure, Mike. Where are you going first?"

"To check out the drop site, then back to Eureka's. We should have plenty of time."

They got up to leave, each of them shaking hands with Holman again, and then turned toward the door. Before they could get there, it opened and a lovely woman stepped into the room. Shayne lifted an eyebrow.

The newcomer was in her late twenties, with sleek brown hair framing an attractive face. The dress she was wearing clung to the curves of her body. She said, "Excuse me, Gerard. We were all worried and wanted to know how things stood. Hello, Tim."

Rourke nodded and said, "Hello, Barbara."

"This is Mike Shayne, Barbara," Holman said. "He's going to be handling the ransom delivery. Mr. Shayne, this is my niece, Barbara Masters."

Shayne nodded politely. Barbara Masters stepped closer

and said, "You *will* get Marcy back for us, won't you, Mr. Shayne?"

"I'll do my best," Shayne said.

Two more people were hesitating in the doorway now, and Shayne turned toward them. The man was about thirty-five, running to overweight, with thinning sandy hair. The woman was a couple of years younger, with short dark hair. Her eyes were fixed intently on Shayne, and she had a little too much of a lean and hungry look for his tastes.

"My son David and his wife Carolyn," Holman introduced. "This is — "

"Mike Shayne, of course," Carolyn Holman finished. "I recognize you from your pictures in the paper, Mr. Shayne. I hear you're a wonderful detective, and I'm sure you'll be able to get dear Marcy back."

There was a faint look of distaste on Tim Rourke's face. Carolyn Holman was evidently far from his favorite member of the family.

"I'll do what I can, Mrs. Holman," Shayne said.

"Oh, call me Carolyn."

Shayne's mouth tightened. Obviously, Carolyn wasn't too broken up over her sister-in-law's kidnapping, despite her pretended concern. And her husband was standing by stolidly, not seeming to mind the lascivious glances that his wife was giving Shayne.

The big redhead had felt an instinctive liking for Gerard Holman, and he knew Marcy must be quite a lady to have Tim fall for her, but Shayne decided that David and Carolyn were two people he could see little of and not mind it a bit. Barbara Masters seemed pleasant enough, though, and her concern for Marcy struck him as genuine. The other brother, Jason, was still an unknown quantity.

Shayne shook hands briefly with David Holman, then said, "We'd better get going, Tim. We've got a lot to do."

"Right." Rourke turned to Gerard Holman. "I—I just want to tell you how sorry I am, Mr. Holman. I should have done something to stop them ... I tried to — "

Holman put a hand on Rourke's arm. "We haven't always seen eye to eye, Rourke," he said, "but I know you care about Marcy. I don't hold any grudges against you. I know you did all you could."

"We don't have much time," Shayne said bluntly. "Let's go."

Rourke joined him, and they hurried out to the Buick. Shayne piloted it back to the highway, then turned north. "Let's take a look at Copperhead Bay," he said. "Although it may be too dark to tell much about it."

It took only a few minutes to reach the bridge, only a few more to check it out from end to end.

The bay was more of an inlet, and the bridge was only about seventy-five yards long. A narrow, sandy beach ran under the south end of it, just like Gerard Holman had said.

Shayne pulled the car over onto the shoulder and paused for a moment, considering the layout. Rourke looked over at him in the glow from the dashboard and said, "What are you really going to do, Mike? I know you well enough to know that you won't just leave the money there for the kidnappers."

"You're right," Shayne said. "There's a little hillock back there about three hundred yards that'll make a good hiding place, and there's a high-powered pair of binoculars in the glove compartment."

"You're going to tail whoever picks up the money." It wasn't a question. "That can be dangerous for a kidnap victim."

"Everything is dangerous when you're dealing with kidnappers. If I can follow them back to Marcy, maybe I can get her and the money back."

"Holman said he didn't care about the money."

"I don't, either." Shayne decided it would be better to be frank. He and Rourke had known each other for too long to start pulling punches now. "But what's to stop them from taking the money and dumping Marcy in the

ocean? I don't want that to happen."

Rourke's voice was subdued when he spoke after a long silence. "Neither do I, Mike. You do what you have to do."

"I intend to," Shayne grunted. "Right now, I'm going to head for Eureka's. From what I've heard of that place, it'll still be jumping, even at this hour."

IV

IT WAS JUMPING, all right. They could hear the music coming from the squatly little building before Shayne even turned the car into the parking lot. There were quite a few vehicles there. Shayne found a spot to leave the Buick, and he and Rourke headed for the door of the club.

"High class place," Shayne said wryly.

"I told you we were slumming."

The raucous music was nearly deafening inside. Two young girls wearing next to nothing were gyrating on top of the long bar, one at each end. Shayne commented into Rourke's ear, "I didn't know this was a strip joint!"

"It's not!" Rourke replied in a bellow. "Must be a couple of juiced-up customers."

They fought their way to the bar and Shayne asked a husky bartender, "You know anything about a fight in the parking lot a

little while ago?"

"What?"

"A fight!"

The bartender spread his hands. "Don't look at me, man! I don't want to fight! I'm a peaceful soul!" He laughed sarcastically.

Shayne's mouth quirked in disgust. There was no way he was going to get any useful information in this bedlam of drunken honky-tonkers.

He became aware of Rourke tugging at his sleeve. Shayne turned back toward him, and Rourke said, "I've got an idea, Mike! Let's get outside before our brains turn to mush!"

When the door had shut behind them and the noise level dropped a few decibels, Rourke said, "Those people in there aren't going to know anything about what happened out here, Mike. You'd need to shoot off a cannon to get their attention anyway. But sometimes a guy will go out to his car to take a private drink or toke or fool around with some other guy's wife. If we can find somebody who's been out here for a while —"

"I get the idea," Shayne cut in. "Let's split up."

Shayne had looked in a dozen or so darkened cars when he spotted two figures in the front seat of an old Dodge. He rapped on the rolled-up window and called, "You in there! Roll the window down for a minute! I want to talk to you."

His only answer was a hand that came out of the shadows and formed itself into a universal gesture.

Shayne tried the car door. It was unlocked. He jerked it open and barked, "Okay, buddy, get out here! How old is that girl?"

The authority in his voice was unmistakable. A couple of frightened teenagers came scurrying out of the car, the boy saying, "It's all right, I swear! We're both old enough."

"Old enough for *what*?" Shayne growled. "Never mind. Did either of you see a fight out here a couple of hours ago?"

"A fight?" the girl asked. "No, we were, ah, busy ..."

Shayne suppressed the urge to spank both of them and was about to ask another question when Rourke called from across the lot, "Mike! Come he —"

His words were cut off, and Shayne heard him go, "Oof!" Somebody else yelled, "Goddam bastard, sneakin' around where ya ain't wanted!"

Shayne muttered, "Oh, hell," and raced across the lot, dodging around the parked cars.

He could see a burly figure manhandling Rourke's lean frame. Evidently, the reporter had disturbed someone who didn't want to be disturbed.

Shayne grabbed the man by the shoulder, spun him around, and rapped, "Hold it!"

"Another one, huh?" the man snarled. "I'll teach you to butt in!"

Shayne sensed rather than saw the punch coming at him. He ducked under it, smelling the raw liquor on the man's breath. All the frustration of the past few minutes came out in the punch that Shayne threw back.

His big hard fist sank nearly to the wrist in the man's soft stomach. Shayne didn't give the man any time to recover from it, following up with a left cross that clipped his chin neatly, turned him halfway around, and dropped him to the concrete.

Rourke was leaning on a car, holding his belly. In a weak voice, he said, "I guess this wasn't such a good idea, either, Mike."

"Come on." Shayne grasped Rourke's arm and led him back to the Buick. "Let's get out of here."

They put Eureka's behind them, and Shayne said, "You've been punched enough for one night. My apartment's closer. I'm going to take you there, and then you're going to bed."

"While you're delivering the money? No, sir, I'm —"

"You're going to shut up and do what I tell you," Shayne snapped. "I've got enough to worry about without wondering if you're going to drop dead any second from exhaustion and that concussion you've probably got."

Rourke saw the look on

Shayne's face and knew that there would be no arguing with the big redhead. He sighed and said, "Well, if you're going to go Irish-stubborn on me, I don't guess I've got any choice."

"That's right," Shayne's voice softened just a shade. "Don't worry, Tim. I'll let you know the minute Marcy is safe."

They went directly to Shayne's apartment, where they both had a drink. Rourke got into a pair of Shayne's seldom-used pajamas, ludicrous though they were on his slender body.

Shayne glanced at his watch, said, "I've got to get started, but there's one thing I wanted to ask you, Tim. Do you think this kidnapping could be an inside job?"

Rourke frowned. "You mean you think one of the Holmans set it up? I can't buy that, Mike. What would be the reason?"

"I don't know," Shayne answered. "But you know it's a possibility that has to be considered. Whoever set it up knew something about the family, knew that you and Marcy were dating."

"Anybody could have found that out by following Marcy."

"That's true," Shayne admitted. "It was just a thought, anyway."

Shayne finished his drink and said goodbye, promising again to keep Rourke up to date on what was happening. He was allowing plenty of time to get back to Sandy.

Point before dawn.

Even the late night clubs were closing up as Shayne drove through Miami and headed north. This was the darkest part of the night, the time when the world seemed to be completely asleep. Shayne saw very few cars on the drive back to Sandy Point.

That was one reason he noticed the glow of bright headlights as he approached the little hill near the turn-off. When he topped the rise, the other car was just pulling out onto the highway from the road that led to Sandy Point. Shayne tried to make out who the driver was, but the lights were too bright to see what was behind them.

He looked at his watch again and did some quick figuring. He turned the Buick around rapidly and headed south again. There was time to follow the other car, as long as it didn't go too far, like all the way back into Miami.

Shayne was curious about whoever would be leaving the Holman estate under the circumstances. He would have thought that they would all stick close to the house until this business was over.

Since traffic was light, he had to hang well back from the other car. He kept it in sight easily for about twenty minutes. They were getting into the northernmost suburbs of the city, and Shayne closed the gap a little more when his quarry turned off the highway

and made its way into a residential district.

The homes here were expensive. Shayne was close enough now to see that the car he was following was a Cadillac. Everyone involved with this case seemed to be wealthy, with the exception of himself and Rourke.

Shayne saw the car pull into the driveway of a big house and come to a stop. The garage doors rose in response to an electronic command as Shayne cruised by on the street, and the Caddy's driver sent it gliding on into the garage. Shayne caught just a glimpse of him, but that brief look was enough.

Shayne had seen him before in courtrooms and police stations. His name was Cal Herron, and Shayne knew him only by reputation.

And he wondered what connection there was between the Holmans and one of the biggest loan sharks in the Miami area.

The question he had asked Tim Rourke a little earlier flashed back into Shayne's head. Rourke had asked him what reason any of the Holmans would have to set up Marcy's kidnapping. Well, here was a possible answer. If one of them owed a debt to Herron and couldn't pay it, he might just be desperate enough to stage something like a kidnapping to raise the money. Better than a broken head.

Unless you were the kidnap victim.

Shayne's big fingers tightened on the steering wheel. All of the Holmans would have to be investigated, their backgrounds looked into thoroughly, even Gerard, although Shayne considered him incapable of doing anything to hurt Marcy. There wasn't time to do it now, though. Right now he had to get on with the money drop and worry about the other things later.

That's what he was thinking as he rounded a corner and saw the big car parked across the road, blocking his way. There were three men with leveled guns standing behind it, ready to cut loose at him.

Mike Shayne said, "Hell!" and hit the brakes.

V

THE BIG REDHEAD SPUN the wheel to the left, sending the Buick into a controlled skid, trying to get it turned around and headed back the other way. The street was almost too narrow for such a maneuver, though, and he had to come to a stop to keep from plowing into a van parked by the curb.

The sound of running footsteps pounding up from the rear made Shayne jerk his head around and reach for his gun. He was just a little too late.

The cold ring of a pistol barrel pressed into his ear.

"Be real still," a voice said. "Use two fingers on your left hand and get the gun out ... slow!"

Shayne took the .38 out as ordered and felt it jerked out of his fingers. The pistol went away from his ear and the man holding it said, "All right, now get out of the car, and do that slow, too."

Again, Shayne did as he was told. The men from the other car had come running up by now, and he was in the middle of a circle of guns. It would be deadly foolishness to try anything in such a situation, and Mike Shayne was no fool.

There was a streetlight down the block, and Shayne could see now who his captor was. Cal Herron was the one who had massaged his ear with the gun barrel, and Shayne had no doubt that the other three worked for him.

Herron singled out two of them and said, "You bring the cars back to the house." To the one remaining, he said, "You and I will take this guy. Keep an eye on him, Ernie. This is Mike Shayne, the hotshot private eye."

"That so?" Ernie asked. "Aw, hell, boss, now you've got me scared."

Herron gestured for Shayne to start walking. He and the gunman fell in behind as Shayne stalked down the darkened street.

As they walked, Herron said, "You know, Shayne, I may be paranoid, but I check out anybody who's even remotely suspicious. I had a feeling somebody was following me, but I didn't expect it to turn out to be you."

"I guess it's your lucky night," Shayne grunted.

"I'd say so. Our paths have never crossed, but a lot of my friends don't like you. They'll become even better friends when they hear about tonight."

That didn't sound good to Shayne. Herron might try to kill him just to curry favor with the Miami underworld.

Shayne's mind was already turning over possible methods of escape. He wasn't sure he wanted to get away just yet, though. Even though time was getting short, he still wanted to know what Herron had been doing at the Holman estate.

They had reached the house where Herron had parked his car. The loan shark directed Shayne to go up the walk to the front door, which was open. Herron seemed unable to resist the urge to boast.

"Yeah, I've got pretty sharp eyes. I spotted headlights behind me a couple of times and decided to see who it was. I got a telephone in my car, Shayne, but you didn't know that. I had the boys ready and waiting for you, didn't I?"

Shayne didn't make any reply, which seemed to anger Herron.

"Come on, bigshot, in the

house! We'll see if you want to talk then."

His Buick and the other car pulled into the driveway, and the other two men joined them in the house seconds later. Herron told them, "Take him in the den."

Shayne's arms were grabbed roughly, and he was propelled down a thickly-carpeted hall to a wood-paneled den, complete with bookshelves, gun cabinets, a massive desk, and a well-stocked bar. Herron, who had grown up in the streets and back alleys of Miami, seemed out of place here. This was the house of a doctor or a lawyer, not a loan shark. Herron was just as much a professional at his business as either of those, though, Shayne reflected grimly.

He could feel his temper building up rapidly to the boiling point, and combined with the urgency of the time situation, he was afraid he was going to explode into violence at any second. He pushed the feelings back down, knowing full well that they could easily get him killed.

There was a clock on the wall surrounded by ornate gilt scroll-work. It told Shayne that the time was twenty minutes until five. It would take around forty minutes to get to Sandy Point from here, so he had a little leeway, but not much. He wished Herron would get on with whatever he wanted.

Herron obliged by sitting down behind the big desk and asking,

"Now just why in hell were you following me, Shayne?"

Shayne decided to try to throw him for a loop right away. He told the truth. "I wanted to see who you were. I wanted to know who was leaving Sandy Point at that particular time."

Herron frowned and said, "Sandy Point? I don't know what you're talking about." As an actor, he made a good loan shark.

"I think you do," Shayne snapped, letting some of the anger he felt come through in his voice. "I think you know at least one of the Holmans, and I think you know what happened to Marcy Holman tonight. I wouldn't be surprised if you were behind all of it."

Herron tried to look baffled, without much success. He must have been aware of his shortcomings at deception, because he suddenly snarled and said, "The hell with it! I don't have to fence with you, Shayne."

Shayne knew that by being blunt with Herron he had placed himself in more danger. If Herron knew something about the kidnapping, had in fact had a hand in it, he wouldn't want Shayne around later to talk about it. Shayne was well aware of the hulking presence of the two men who stood behind him. The third one had left the room, but no doubt he was nearby.

Herron pointed a finger at Shayne and said, "I don't like you,

shamus, and I don't want anything to do with you. I'll be damned if I'm going to sit here and let you pump me. And to tell you the truth, I don't really care why you were following me. I'm just going to teach you not to do it again. When I get through with you, you won't ever want to hear my name again, let alone follow me!"

He nodded abruptly, and Shayne heard the movement behind him. He ducked suddenly, and a blackjack whistled through the empty air where his head had been a split second before.

No point in holding in his anger now. He let it explode as he whirled, sending a big knobby fist smashing into the belly of the man with the blackjack. That one staggered backwards, but the other one launched himself toward Shayne.

Shayne avoided the lunge neatly and swung a roundhouse right that connected solidly with the man's jaw. He went crashing back into Herron's desk, half-collapsing onto it and shaking his head, dazed by Shayne's blow.

The first man had recovered from the stomach punch, however, and was swinging wildly at Shayne now. The punches had plenty of power behind them, but none of them connected. Shayne was fast for a man of his size, able to dodge the blows and step in to give some of his own.

Herron cursed and prodded the man who was lying against the

desk. "Get back in there, dammit! I want that redhead clown taught a lesson!"

The man shook the last of the cobwebs away and leaped on Shayne's back, pinning the detective's arms. Shayne whirled and fell over, falling on the man holding him and using the opportunity to kick the other man in his already bruised stomach.

Neither of the men had pulled a gun, so for a few moments it was bare knuckles, no holds barred, a free-for-all of the sort in which Shayne excelled. Both of his opponents had a weight advantage over him, but Shayne was faster and pretty big himself. He put every bit of power in his rangy body into his well-aimed punches.

One of the men went out of the fight for good when Shayne landed a left-right combination that pulped his nose and sent blood spurting.

The other one moved in too close, trying to trap Shayne in a bear hug, and he stepped right into the uppercut that Shayne had started almost at floor level. Shayne felt the impact all the way up his arm as the punch hit home. The man went sprawling on the floor, and there was so much power in the punch that Shayne himself lost his balance and almost went to one knee.

Herron said quietly, "All right, Ernie."

Shayne looked up to see the third man standing in the doorway

of the den. There was a high-powered rifle cradled in his hands, and it was lined up squarely on Shayne's forehead.

There was no arguing with that. At that range, a slug from the rifle wouldn't leave enough of his head to even identify it.

Shayne shrugged and stood up slowly.

Herron came around from behind the desk. His pistol was out again now, and his face was contorted in anger. He said, "You bastard!" and swung the gun.

It was get hit or get his head blown off.

A hell of a choice.

The gun barrel slashed across the side of Shayne's head, staggering him. He kept his feet, but only until Herron drove the hard barrel into the pit of his stomach. The redhead went to his knees, nausea climbing up his throat, his fists almost aching to smash out at Herron ...

If only the rifle hadn't been there.

The butt of Herron's pistol thudded into the back of his head, setting off fireworks that weren't pretty at all. He was vaguely aware of his face hitting the floor as he fell forward.

After that, Mike Shayne didn't know a thing.

It was a big itch, one that covered his whole face. He raised a hand and brushed at it, and a cloud of mosquitoes rose around his head.

He was outside, lying on damp, soggy ground. Pain rippled throughout his body as he sat up, exploring his head gingerly with his fingertips. There were no mushy places, just a few lumps.

From the feel of his torso, Herron and his men had gotten in some kicking practice after he had been knocked cold. Nothing seemed to be broken, though. It had been a hell of a beating, calculated to cause him a great deal of pain without really injuring him.

Shayne swiped a hand at the circling mosquitoes again and then looked at the watch on his wrist. Its luminous dial told him that it was five-thirty. If it was right, and he hoped like blazes that it was, he hadn't been out long. He had to be somewhere close to Herron's house.

Getting to his feet was a painful process that took a minute, but when he had made it, he had little trouble walking. There were trees all around, but he could see street-lights not far off. He started trudging in that direction.

It didn't take long to reach the street. Shayne recognized the neighborhood as the one in which Herron lived. The Buick was parked at the curb.

As much as he would have liked

to go back and settle the score with Herron, Shayne knew that he didn't have time. He would have to break all the speed laws just to get to Sandy Point in time to pick up the ransom money for the drop.

The keys were in the Buick's ignition. Shayne got it started and headed for the highway.

His gun was gone, of course, but a quick check told him that Herron and his men had either missed the spare he carried under the dash or left it there on purpose. He holstered the weapon and then concentrated on his driving as the speedometer needle began to creep up.

Despite the fierce ache in his head, Shayne was still able to turn some things over in his brain. Herron could have killed him or at least put him out of action for a long time. The fact that he hadn't might well be further proof of his involvement in the kidnapping. If it was indeed an inside job set up by one of the Holmans with Herron's aid, the loan shark would in all likelihood know that Shayne had been selected to deliver the ransom. In that case, he couldn't let Shayne be killed.

It fit together, all right, but Shayne knew that fitting together didn't necessarily make it the right answer. Proving it was another matter and would take more time than he had right now.

There were very few cars on the highway, and Shayne was able to push the Buick up over ninety

miles an hour. The sky was beginning to show signs of gray to the east. Shayne fished some aspirin out of the glove compartment, swallowed them dry, and pressed down harder on the accelerator.

It was thirteen minutes after six when he came to a tire squealing halt in front of the grotesque mansion on Sandy Point. Holman was coming out of the front door of the house before Shayne had even shut the engine off.

"We were beginning to get worried," Holman said anxiously. "You said you'd be back by six."

"I ran into some trouble," Shayne grunted as he got out of the car. "Do you know a man named Cal Herron?" he asked bluntly.

"Who? What's this all about, Shayne?"

The big investigator wished he could answer that. Either Gerard Holman was telling the truth when he acted baffled at Herron's name, or he was the best liar that Shayne had ever run across.

Shayne ignored Holman's questions and asked another of his own. "Do you have the money ready?"

"Jason has it in the study."

Shayne followed Holman down the hall. The artist opened the study door and said, "Here's Mr. Shayne, Jason."

Jason Holman was in his late twenties or early thirties, with dark hair and fairly thick glasses.

His handshake was firm as he said, "I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Shayne. I certainly hope you can get Marcy back safely. I was pleasantly surprised when Dad told me you were going to handle the ransom delivery." He smiled, but it was only a shadow of a grin, a haunted thing. "Marcy is my only sister, you know. I don't ... I don't want anything to happen to her."

The maudlin tone in Jason's voice made Shayne impatient, even though he had no doubt that it was sincere. He snapped, "Is that the money?" and pointed at a good-sized attache case on the desk.

"That's right." Jason sounded more businesslike now as he unsnapped the latches and lifted the lid of the case. "Nothing larger than a twenty. I assume that's what they meant by small bills."

Shayne nodded as he scanned the tightly-packed bundles of bills. Jason closed the case and handed it to him. Shayne said, "I'd better get going."

Holman caught his arm. "You said you wanted to investigate some things before you delivered the money. Did you find out anything?"

"Maybe," Shayne said cryptically. "We'll know later." He hefted the case. "Right now, I've got to get this delivered."

He didn't see any other members of the family as he stalked back out to his car. Holman and

Jason followed him outside and watched grimly as he drove away.

THE SKY WAS PINK in the east now. Shayne wouldn't have wanted to cut it any closer than he already had. It was a damn good thing he had allowed himself plenty of leeway before starting out for Sandy Point the first time.

It took him only a few minutes to get to the Copperhead Bay Bridge. He parked on the shoulder at the south end of it and got out, carrying the money.

The sun was just below the horizon now, and it would be making its first appearance of the day any minute. Shayne guessed that this was close enough to dawn. There was no traffic on the road for as far as he could see in either direction as he climbed down the gentle slope of the embankment to the beach.

He walked under the bridge, noting the trash that had accumulated there among the pilings. He looked around, up and down the beach and across the bay, but there was no one in sight. He might have been alone in this dawn world, with its pale pink light.

Shayne hurried back to his car and started it up, turning it around and heading back in the direction from which he had come. He knew that the peacefulness of the morning was only an illusion, and he had plenty of aches and pains to prove it. And soon, a kidnapper

would pick up that money, hopefully leading him back to the innocent victim.

He drove nearly three-quarters of a mile before he found a stand of palm trees growing thickly together behind which he could conceal the car. He parked it out of sight, took his binoculars from the equipment case in the trunk, and forced his sore muscles to break into a run.

Moments later, he was crouched behind the little hill he had pointed out to Rourke several hours earlier. The view of the bridge was unobstructed from here, and he kept the glasses on the south end, waiting.

No cars came along for several minutes, then a flicker of movement from across the bay caught his eye. He shifted the glasses and saw a dark blue van coming toward him. It crossed the bridge and then pulled off onto the shoulder.

Shayne saw a man open the door and duck out quickly, running down to the beach and then disappearing under the bridge. Shayne didn't wait to see any more. By the time the man came out from under the bridge carrying the attache case, Shayne was half-way back to his Buick and sprinting like he was an Olympic athlete.

By the time he got back to the bridge in the car, the blue van was only a speck on the far side. Shayne breathed a sigh of relief

that it was still in sight, though. Tailing it might not be the easiest thing in the world, but it was the kind of job he was good at.

He followed the car northward for nearly five miles before it turned right on a little dirt road that led toward the ocean, about half a mile away. Shayne cruised on by the turnoff as the van disappeared behind some rolling dunes. He left the Buick on the side of the highway a hundred yards past the dirt road and trotted back on foot.

He heard the van's motor in the early morning silence, then heard it stop. The small hills between the highway and the shore were covered with brush, and Shayne left the road to approach under its cover.

Climbing to the top of the last rise, he peered over it cautiously. The van was parked beside a tiny cove, and floating on the water was a small boat. The man from the van was wading out to it, the attache case in hand. Another man waited for him on the deck.

Shayne slid his gun out of its holster and began working his way down the hill slowly, taking advantage of every bit of cover he could find. He wanted to be as close as possible before he made his move.

The thick brush ran almost all the way down to the water. Shayne reached the edge of it as the man with the money started to climb aboard the boat. Shayne's gray

eyes scanned the deck quickly, but there was no sign of Marcy. They must have her tied up in the small cabin, he decided.

The one on deck reached down to help the man with the money, and Shayne stood up and called, "Freeze, both of you!"

The man on deck let go of his companion and grabbed for something tucked behind his belt. Shayne didn't wait to see what it was. He fired, the bullet drilling neatly into the man's shoulder. He toppled to the deck with a yell.

The man with the money had fallen backwards into the water when the other one let him go, and he was floundering back up now, still tightly clutching the case. Shayne ran through the shallow water toward him. The man threw the case up in self-defense, but Shayne's gun slashed past it and slammed into his head, knocking him backwards. Shayne jerked the case out of his hands.

Soaked by the run through the water, Shayne clambered onto the boat, kicking the other man's fallen gun well out of reach. The man was clutching his broken, bleeding shoulder, and didn't seem too interested in what was going on, anyway.

Shayne ran over to the cabin and tried the knob on the door. It wouldn't turn. There was no other place on the boat to conceal Marcy Holman, so Shayne reared back and planted his big foot next to the lock with a crash. The door

shivered but held under the first kick. The second sent it flying open.

Shayne ducked down, peered into the room, and said viciously, "Dammit!"

The cabin was empty.

VII

SHAYNE FLICKED HIS EYES around the cabin. Except for a few items of furniture, it was undoubtedly empty, and there were no hiding places in it.

He didn't have time to speculate on Marcy Holman's fate, though. The slippery sound of shoes on the deck warned him.

As he jerked around, his own foot slipped in one of the puddles that had formed around him. Off balance, he saw the man from the water lunging at him.

Shayne snapped off a quick shot, but the slick deck threw off his aim. The bullet went wide, and the man crashed into him. Both of them went down.

The attache case slipped from Shayne's hand, but he was too busy fighting his attacker to worry about it. He tried to bring his gun into play, but the quarters were too close. The other man's fingers closed around his throat and squeezed with desperate strength.

Shayne's gun arm was practically useless, pinned down by the other man's knee. The strangle-hold was getting tighter by the second. Shayne arched his back

and tried to throw the man off, but his opponent was broad and heavy. The angle was such that blows from Shayne's free hand didn't have the power required to do any damage.

Twisting his body as sparks began to dance before his eyes, Shayne drew his legs up and managed to hook a foot over the man's shoulder and in front of his neck. Raising his weight on his shoulders, Shayne straightened his leg suddenly, snapping the man's head back roughly. Shayne's heel dug into his throat. With a strangled cry, the man flew backwards.

The redhead rolled and came up in a crouch, his oxygen-starved lungs making him gasp for air. The other man was holding his own throat and making gurgling moans, seemingly out of action for the moment. But that's what Shayne had thought before. He stepped forward and sent a hard right fist smashing into the man's jaw. That would hold him. The detective stepped over the now prone body and out onto the deck.

Immediately, he knew something was wrong. The man whom he had shot in the shoulder was gone.

"Bastard!"

It came from behind Shayne, from the top of the cabin. He whirled, bringing his gun up. The other man had climbed onto the roof while Shayne was fighting

inside, the noise of the battle covering up any sounds he had made. Now he stood there shakily, a shotgun held out in front of him one-handed, blood still oozing from the wound in his other shoulder.

One of the barrels of the shotgun erupted before Shayne could even get a round of his own off. At that range, it was hard to miss, and it was only the rocking of the boat that saved Shayne's life.

The boat lurched and he slipped down as the shotgun roared, the pellets passing close beside him, peppering the deck and the water. Shayne tucked his arms in and rolled as fast as he could, right off the side.

The water was deep enough for him to go completely under the surface. His powerful legs kicked him away from the boat. He wanted to stay submerged for as long as possible. He wasn't just about to go climbing back up into the face of that scattergun unless he had to.

It didn't sound like he would have to. The throb of the engines reached his ears. One of the men must have recovered enough to get the boat underway again. When the sound diminished, Shayne poked his head up. The boat was already out of the inlet and picking up speed as it headed out to sea. Shayne cursed and waded out onto the scrub-covered beach.

His gun had slipped away from him somewhere underwater. If he had it, he would have taken a shot at the fleeing kidnappers, impossible though it would have been to hit anything at that range.

Shayne pushed wet hair out of his eyes and rubbed his jaw. There didn't seem to be anything to do except go back to his car, so he headed in that direction. The soaking had made him a little chilly in the early morning air.

This case had been nothing but a disaster right from the start, he reflected as he sloshed wetly back to the Buick. He had drawn a blank at Eureka's, he had been beaten up by Cal Herron and his men, he had lost two guns, and now he had lost Gerard Holman's \$250,000, not to mention his daughter.

Shayne's face was grim. He held little hope for Marcy's life now. The kidnappers must have decided that returning her would be too risky. They had probably killed her and dumped her in the ocean before coming in to pick up the money.

All Shayne could do now was try to track them down again, as he had promised Tim Rourke. The blue van was still parked near the shore, and he noted the license number of it in his head, but he doubted that it would do any good. Chances were good that it had been stolen just for the ransom pickup.

When he got back to the Buick, he considered calling Sandy Point on the radio-telephone under the dash, but decided against it. It would take only a few minutes to drive there, and Gerard Holman deserved to hear the bad news in person, unpleasant though it would be for Shayne to deliver it.

Water formed a little puddle on the floorboard as he drove, dripping off his legs. The ten minute drive to Sandy Point seemed to take only seconds.

It looked like everyone was waiting for him, Shayne saw grimly. The entire Holman family was standing on the porch, Gerard Holman in front, tension putting even more lines on his old face. Behind him were David and Carolyn, looking very jittery, and Jason, looking almost like he wanted to cry. Barbara Masters stood slightly to one side, her attractive features set in a tight mask.

They all began to look even more upset when Shayne pulled up and got out of the car alone. Gerard Holman took a step toward him and said hesitantly, "Mr. Shayne ... Is Marcy ... Where is she, Mr. Shayne? What happened?"

"Everything got screwed up," Shayne said bluntly. "I lost your money, Mr. Holman, and I didn't find —"

"Oh, my God!" Barbara Masters exclaimed.

Shayne looked at her and saw

that she was gazing in amazement over his shoulder. The other Holmans looked in that direction, too, and one by one, their eyes widened and their jaws dropped. Shayne jerked his head around to see what they were staring at.

A figure was trudging down the road. A slim figure, clad only in bra and panties, with long blonde hair that was wet and plastered to her bare shoulders. The girl looked so exhausted that it was hard to believe she could take another step.

"Marcy!"

The cry was torn out of Gerard Holman's throat, and then he was running down the road like a man half his age, with the others stringing out behind him. Shayne paused only for a second, to tug at his earlobe in consternation, then kicked his sore muscles into motion, joining the procession down the road.

Marcy had almost fallen into her father's arms, and now Gerard was hugging her to him tightly, as if to never let her go again. The others all crowded around, filling the air with questions.

"My God, Marcy, are you all right?"

"What happened?"

"Did you escape?"

"Did you swim all that way ashore?"

Shayne stood off to one side of the almost hysterical reunion. He saw more than a few tears, and he felt quite a wave of relief himself.

After a moment, Gerard realized that his daughter was soaking wet. "Let's get you inside, Marcy. After all you've been through, you don't want to catch cold."

Shayne's mouth quirked.

The whole group walked back up the road to the house. Jason lagged a little bit behind, and Shayne fell into step beside him. He asked, "Do you think I could find some dry clothes in the house?"

"I'm sure we've got something that will fit you, Mr. Shayne," Jason answered distractedly, shaking his head in wonderment. "You looked so grim when you drove up, I never expected to see Marcy again."

"Neither did I," Shayne admitted. "I'll fill you in on what happened, and you can tell your father later, when he's calmed down a little bit."

Shayne quickly outlined what had happened since dawn. He left out any mention of his run-in with Herron earlier, since he still wanted to check out all the Holmans for any connection with the loan shark, Jason included.

When they got in the house, Jason led Shayne to a spare bedroom on the second floor and said, "I'll bring you some of Dad's clothes, Mr. Shayne. They're probably the only ones around here big enough to fit you. There's a bathroom through that door where you can dry off."

Jason left the room and Shayne stripped off the sodden clothes he was wearing. While he was in the bathroom using a thick towel to rub some of the chill away, Jason came in and called, "I'll leave the clothes on the bed, Mr. Shayne."

"Thanks," Shayne called back.

The clothes were only a little snug, and they felt good after wearing the wet ones. Jason had even brought socks. Shayne slipped them on, raised a disparaging eyebrow at the state of his shoes, and decided that socks would be enough for the time being.

There was a telephone extension on the night table beside the bed. Shayne sat down and lifted the receiver. He didn't think that Gerard Holman would mind. Holman was so happy that Marcy was back safely, he wasn't going to be caring about anything else for a while.

Shayne dialed the number of his apartment. Not even one ring was complete before the phone on the other end was snatched up.

Tim Rourke's voice said, "Hello?"

"It's me, Tim. I figured you would be asleep."

"Mike? Oh, man, am I glad to hear from you! How could I sleep? Tell me, what happened?"

"I thought you'd want to know ... Marcy's home, and she's safe."

VIII

TEN MINUTES LATER, Shayne went downstairs to find Marcy sitting on a sofa, wrapped in a thick robe, drinking coffee. The rest of the family surrounded her. Gerard sat beside her, one arm around her shoulders.

Evidently, she had been telling everyone what had happened, because she was saying, "... didn't know where I was, I just knew I was on a boat."

"But how did you get away?" David asked.

"They got careless. They untied me to let me go to the bathroom, and I just jumped overboard."

"Good Lord," Gerard breathed. "Without even knowing where you were?"

"I figured I'd be better off in the ocean than with them. I was right. We were about a quarter of a mile offshore. I saw land when I made my dive, so I just stayed underwater as long as I could and headed in that direction." Her voice dropped and became a trifle shaky. "I don't know if they shot at me or not, but if they did, they missed. They must have thought I had drowned, because they didn't come after me."

Gerard noticed Shayne standing there and said, "Sit down, Shayne! Marcy, this is Mike Shayne. He delivered the ransom money."

"Lost the ransom money, you mean," Shayne grunted.

Holman waved a hand. "That doesn't matter, doesn't matter a bit! What's important is that Marcy's back."

Marcy smiled shyly and said, "Hello, Mr. Shayne. I've heard Tim speak about you a lot."

"Only the good parts are true," Shayne grinned.

"It was all good."

Shayne took the only available place to sit down, half of a love seat next to Barbara Masters. She didn't seem to mind. Shayne said, "I really am sorry about the money; things just didn't work out like I had planned. I'm glad the results came out so well, though."

Gerard patted Marcy's shoulder and stood up. "Jason, write Mr. Shayne a check, will you?" He crossed to the love seat, and Shayne stood up to shake the hand that Holman extended. "We really are grateful for everything you did."

Shayne frowned. "You don't owe me anything," he said. "Not until I find the kidnappers."

"We can let the police do that, now that Marcy's safe," Holman said. "There's no great hurry now."

Jason came back from a desk in one corner of the room and held out a check to Shayne. Without taking it, the detective saw that it was for twenty-five hundred dollars.

"I hope that's enough," Gerard Holman said.

Shayne rasped his thumbnail

along his jaw. Slowly, he said, "I don't want to seem ungrateful, Mr. Holman, but I can't take money for a job I messed up. It just goes against the grain."

"The check's already written," Holman said softly.

"All right," Shayne said abruptly, taking the check. The Miami Police Department had a scholarship fund for the children of officers killed in the line of duty. They could put the money to good use.

"I'd better be getting back to Miami," he said. "Do you mind if I send these clothes back to you later?"

"Of course not."

"I'll call the cops when I get there and fill them in on everything that's happened. Are you sure you don't want me to stay on the case myself?"

"I'm positive, Shayne. All I care about is Marcy."

It was official, then; Shayne was without a client. He said his goodbyes, was thanked again by everyone, and left in the Buick, tossing his wet clothes onto the floor in the back seat. He pointed the nose of the car south, toward Miami.

Maybe he didn't have a client, and yeah, Marcy was home safely. But he had promised Tim Rourke that he would find out who was behind the kidnapping, and besides, there was still some unfinished business with Cal Herron and his boys.

And it would be thirty below

zero in Miami before Mike Shayne broke a promise to a friend or left a score unsettled ...

IX

TIM ROURKE WAS GONE when Shayne got back to his apartment. There was a note there, thanking him for everything he had done and promising to call him later in the day. Shayne read it and then tossed it down with a dissatisfied grunt. It looked like everybody was going to thank him, and he still felt like he didn't deserve it.

The events of the last twelve hours were catching up to him now. He stood under the shower for a long ten minutes with the water turned as hot as he could stand it. Then he made two phone calls, one to Chief Will Gentry to report the kidnapping and tell him everything that had happened, the second to his secretary and confidante, Lucy Hamilton, to tell her the same story and explain why he wouldn't be in to the office until later, if at all.

After that, he fell into bed wearily, knowing that he would fall asleep despite the bright Miami sunshine slanting in the window.

Two minutes later, his eyes snapped open and he was wide awake, but it wasn't because of the brightness in the room.

Repeating the story in detail to Lucy and Gentry had jogged something in his head. There was

something wrong there, something that didn't fit. But he couldn't quite grasp it, even when he went over the sequence of events yet again in his mind.

The missing piece refused to surface, but something else occurred to Shayne. It was almost too good to be true, - the way Marcy had escaped. The men he had clashed with hadn't struck him as such rank amateurs as to let a twenty-year-old girl outwit them.

Unless they wanted to. Unless they wanted her to escape.

Or were under *orders* to let her escape.

That fit, all right. If one of the Holman family had set up the kidnapping, as he suspected, they might have ordered that Marcy not be hurt and be allowed to escape. According to Marcy, she had not been molested in any way, and she herself had slipped her dress off when she was in the water.

Also, the boat had been only a quarter of a mile offshore when she escaped, and while that was a pretty good distance for some people to swim, a potential Olympian like Marcy could handle it with ease.

Add to that the unlikely fact that she had come ashore within walking distance of Sandy Point, and Shayne's theory became even more solid. *Marcy Holman had been meant to escape and come home unharmed.*

Shayne knew that if he could come up with the thing that had been bothering him, he would have the answer he wanted. He would know which one of her own family had had Marcy kidnapped, which one was probably in debt to Cal Herron.

But the answer wouldn't come, and while Shayne was turning everything over in his head, sleep crept in on him and sent him back into the same dark world from which Tim Rourke had roused him the night before.

He stayed there peacefully, body and mind resting and recovering their strength and vitality, until late that afternoon. This time it was the ringing of the telephone that woke him up.

When the shrill summons penetrated, he sat up, rubbed a hand over his face, and then padded into the living room to pick up the receiver.

"Yeah?"

"This is Tim, Mike. How are you doing?"

"Better. How are you?"

"I'm fine," Rourke answered, and sounded it. "I've been out to see Marcy. I can hardly believe she's back and all right."

Shayne got a cigarette from a pack lying on the telephone table and lit it, then said, "How about dinner tonight, Tim?"

"I think I can make it. Something on your mind?"

"Damn right."

"Oh-oh. I don't know if I like

the sound of that."

"I'll tell you all about it over some steaks."

Which was exactly what he did. Meeting Rourke at the Beef House at seven, Shayne waited until they had thick steaks, baked potatoes, and fresh drinks in front of them before he outlined his theory. He included the encounter with Cal Herron and its circumstances and led Rourke through the whole line of reasoning.

The cadaverous reporter, who had been packing away the food at his usual rate, paused and looked skeptical. "I don't know, Mike," he said slowly. "I just can't buy it that one of Marcy's family would have her kidnapped. I mean, one of her own family, for Christ's sake!"

"A quarter of a million might be enough to make somebody forget that," Shayne said. "Or almost. Remember, somebody took pains to see that Marcy got home safely."

"That's true," Rourke nodded.

"Tell me some more about the family. I'd like to know which ones would be likely to be mixed up with somebody like Cal Herron. He was visiting *somebody* out there last night."

Rourke considered for a moment, then said, "David is a possibility. I know he likes high living. That's why he's good at what he does for his father, setting up shows and the like. He moves in the circles that have a lot

of money to spend on pet projects. But I hear he likes to do a little high-class gambling, too."

"What about Jason?"

"Too much of a straight arrow, Mike. He's only comfortable with his ledgers and bankbooks and income tax forms. He doesn't play the horses or run around with wild women. How would he get in Dutch with Herron?"

Shayne nodded and sipped the excellent cognac. "And Barbara Masters?"

Tim smiled. "A nice girl. I might have gone for her myself if I hadn't already met Marcy."

"How long has she lived at Sandy Point?"

"A few years; I'm not sure. She's an orphan, comes from the Midwest somewhere. Her mother was Gerard's sister. She seems happy there, and from what Marcy says, she's very good at what she does, which is keeping the house running smoothly."

"Does she have money of her own?"

Rourke shook his head. "Not that I know of."

So far, the most likely suspect was David Holman. Shayne thought for a moment, then said, "What about Gerard himself?"

Rourke looked incredulous. "You've got to be kidding! He doesn't just think the sun rises and sets on Marcy, he thinks she *is* the sun! No way, Mike, just no way."

Coming from some people, such a glowing recommendation

would have only made Shayne more suspicious. But he respected Rourke's assessment, knowing that years of newspaper work had made him a shrewd judge of character.

Shayne finished his drink and said, "I feel like I've got everything I need to solve this one, Tim, if I could just put it together."

"Does Gerard want you to continue with the case?"

"Nope. But I'm going to anyway. You got beat up, I got beat up, and there's \$250,000 missing." Shayne stood up. "No, I'm not going to let this one go yet, Tim."

"Where are you headed now?"

"I'm going to pay a visit to Cal Herron. Maybe I can convince him to tell me which one of the Holmans he's friends with."

Rourke frowned. "He can play rough, Mike."

"So can I," Shayne grunted.

It took him about thirty minutes to make his way through the evening traffic out to the suburbs where Cal Herron lived. Night was just settling down, snuffing out the last vestiges of the sun, when he reached the familiar neighborhood.

He parked several blocks from Herron's house and walked the remaining distance. He was going to scout a little before he went busting in.

There were lights on in Herron's house. Shayne slipped down a

hedge that separated the loan shark's property from the house next door. Shayne wondered briefly if Herron's neighbors knew what he really did for a living.

There was a lighted window at the side of the house. Shayne crouched underneath it. The glass was up, and he could hear the sounds of silverware against china clearly through the screen. Evidently, the window opened into a dining room, and someone was making use of it.

He heard Cal Herron say, "To us," and then a familiar female voice said, "To us." There was the clink of wine glasses brought together in a toast.

Shayne edged his head up until he could case a glance through the window. His mouth drew down into a tight line.

Barbara Masters was sitting across the table from Herron, and she was staring into his eyes with what was, beyond a doubt, love.

X

AN HOUR LATER, SHAYNE was back in his car, heading away from Cal Herron's house. Most of the hour had been spent crouching under the dining room window, listening to the conversation between the loan shark and Barbara Masters. He had left his listening post only when Herron and Barbara had gotten up from the table and made it obvious that

their destination was the bedroom.

Shayne frowned as he drove through Miami toward his apartment. Tonight's discovery should have cleared things up more than it had. Herron must have been visiting Barbara Masters when Shayne tailed him away from Sandy Point, and that led to the conclusion that Barbara had planned the kidnapping, possibly with Herron's help.

Somehow, that didn't sit right with him, though. The two of them had talked of many things while Shayne crouched outside the window, but kidnapping hadn't been one of them. Herron had spoken of a windfall that would enable them to live free and easy, but he had talked like it was something in the future, not a *fait accompli*. And dammit, Shayne thought, Barbara may have had extremely bad taste in men, but she didn't seem like the type that would put Marcy's life in danger.

So Shayne hadn't gone busting in like he had planned to. He had just waited and listened and then gone away, more puzzled than before.

Herron knew about the kidnapping, that was for sure. It had been well into the wee hours of the morning when he had visited Sandy Point. Shayne went through a possible reconstruction in his head.

Barbara and Herron were lovers, that much he knew. When Barbara heard about the

kidnapping, she could have called Herron and asked him to come out to the estate secretly. With all the confusion that had been going on, it would have been easy for Herron to park the car a little way from the mansion and slip inside on foot for his rendezvous with Barbara.

Shayne's craggy brow creased even more. His eyes were watching the road as he drove with his customary alertness, but his brain was busy with its deductions.

Perhaps Barbara resented being the poor relation of the Holman family, despite her surface pleasantness. When the kidnapping occurred, she might have seen it as a way to cash in and get some money of her own. So she called her boyfriend and told him what had happened, filled him in on the details of the ransom delivery ...

So that Herron and his men could follow Shayne when he delivered the money and pick it up themselves. It must have been quite a shock to Herron when Shayne turned up following him. But they had made the reaction to his tail job look typical of small-time hoods, so he wouldn't suspect anything. Then they had made sure they didn't hurt him enough to keep him from delivering the money on schedule.

Shayne shook his head suddenly and pulled on his earlobe. It was all conjecture, but it hung to-

gether. It could very well have happened that way. But if it had, then why hadn't Herron and his men gotten the money from under the bridge? Had they spotted Shayne watching the place?

And this new theory still left him with the question of who had arranged the kidnapping. As before, he felt like he had the answer to that one lodged somewhere in the back of his brain.

Theorizing was fine, but Shayne would have liked some direct action about now. He had wanted to go a few rounds with Herron, and had only restrained himself because he wanted to find out as much as he could while Barbara Masters was there talking to the loan shark.

Arriving at his apartment, he fixed himself a drink and then sat down to sip on it and think.

If his theory about Barbara and Herron was correct, it could be that none of the Holmans owed money to Herron. The kidnapping could have had an entirely different motive.

A different motive ... That was something Shayne had considered briefly, but then Herron had entered the picture.

Shayne tossed back the rest of his drink and suppressed an urge to growl in frustration. Things had been moving so fast on this case, with so many unexpected developments, that this was the first time he had had a chance to sit down and really try to think everything

through. And he still didn't have any answers.

He had a tired body, though. The day-long sleep had revitalized him to a certain extent, but the lack of sleep the night before and all the fights he had found himself involved in had sapped more of his energy than he had thought. He didn't mean to fall asleep, but before he knew it, he was leaned back in the comfortable chair, snoring raucously.

Again it was the telephone that woke him. This time he had only to reach out to pick it up. He was a little startled as he did so to see early morning sunlight slanting in the window.

He put the receiver to his ear and said, "Shayne here."

The familiar gravel voice of Miami Chief of Police Will Gentry growled, "Morning, Mike. I've got some news for you."

Shayne sat up, a prickle of anticipation playing along his spine as he recognized the tone of Gentry's voice. "What is it, Will?"

"You know that boat and those two kidnappers you told me about yesterday ... ?"

"Sure."

"Well, they've turned up."

Shayne's fingers tightened on the phone. "You caught them?"

"I wouldn't say that. A fisherman spotted the boat adrift south of here. He reported it to the Coast Guard. When they got there, they found two men on board, and they

match the descriptions you gave us. They were dead, Mike."

"Dead?"

"Somebody poured a few dozen slugs into them. The Coast Guard brought the boat in, and the technical boys from the State Police jumped right on it. A copy of their report is on my desk right now. Looks like the two men were killed sometime late last night."

After Herron had boasted of his coming windfall, Shayne thought. "I don't suppose the Coast Guard found \$250,000 on board the boat, did they?" he asked bitterly.

"No such luck. You think somebody double-crossed those boys, Mike?"

"No. I think Cal Herron ambushed them and took the ransom for himself," Shayne said bluntly. "He knew about the kidnapping and followed me to the payoff. Then he followed me while I followed the kidnappers. After they got away from me, he and his boys tracked them down."

"Have you got proof for any of that?"

Shayne's lips quirked into a crooked grin. "Not right now. I will, though. You can count on it."

"Assuming you're right, why didn't Herron just grab the money from under the bridge before the kidnappers got there?"

"Maybe he wanted to find Marcy, snatch her himself and hold her for more ransom. When he saw that she wasn't on the boat, he decided to get whatever

he could, like the two-hundred and fifty grand."

Shayne could almost see Gentry nodding thoughtfully as the chief said, "It's probably a lucky thing for Marcy Holman that she was able to get away and swim ashore."

Just like that, at the prodding of Gentry's words, the thing that had been stuck in the back of Shayne's head popped free. He knew now what had been nagging at him all this time. He said a quick goodbye to a somewhat startled Gentry and hung up.

Someone at the Holman house had asked Marcy Holman if she swam all that way ashore. But that had been before either Shayne or Marcy had said anything about a boat!

Whoever had asked that question had known about the boat, and the only way he could have known was if he had set up the kidnapping.

Shayne closed his eyes and sent his memory back twenty-four hours, to that confused reunion, when Marcy had come staggering in and taken everyone by surprise. He tried to remember everything, but most of all the babble of voices, sorting, separating, trying to lift that one particular voice out of his crowded memory ...

And then he had it.

There were grim trenches etched in Shayne's cheeks as he showered and shaved and quickly put on fresh clothes. He wanted to

get out to Sandy Point and keep a date with a kidnapper.

He wanted to find out why Jason Holman would have his own sister kidnapped.

XI

SHAYNE THOUGHT ABOUT calling Tim Rourke and asking him to go along, but he decided against it. The normally cool-headed reporter had trouble seeing straight where Marcy was concerned, and Shayne thought it would be better to confront Jason by himself.

His stomach growled as he left Miami. He hadn't even stopped for coffee. *Let it growl*, he thought. Solving a case was just as good as a meal any day.

As he sped northward, he considered possible motives for Jason to have Marcy kidnapped. Money was the most obvious, of course, but Jason seemed to have plenty of money at his disposal as his father's business manager.

Shayne drove with his right hand and worried at his earlobe with his left. Maybe the motive was tied in with Jason's position as business manager. According to Rourke, Gerard Holman was in good shape financially, but the only one who would know that for sure was Jason, since he was really the only one who handled the money.

Suppose he had been skimming for himself, or that some of his

investments had turned sour and he didn't want his father to know. Jason had been the one to gather up the ransom money, and he would have probably known that's the way it would be.

Shayne wished he had looked under the top layer of bills in that attache case. He would have been willing to bet that the rest of the so-called ransom was nothing but cut-up bundles of newsprint.

Jason had made sure that Marcy would not be harmed, and he knew that his father cared much more about Marcy than he did about the ransom. When the \$250,000 was never recovered, Gerard would likely chalk it up as lost, and Jason's mistake, whatever it was, would be covered up completely.

Shayne shrugged mentally. He was convinced now that Jason Holman was behind the kidnapping. The why of it could wait. Shayne had promised Tim Rourke that he would deliver the man behind the scheme, and he was going to do it.

After that, there would be time to get the goods on Herron for hijacking the ransom, what there was of it. Shayne grinned coldly. That must have been quite a shock, when Herron opened the case and found only a fraction of what he expected.

The Buick had been eating up the ground at high speed, and now Shayne realized that he was within a mile or two of Sandy Point. He rounded a wide bend in the high-

way and met another car, traveling toward Miami at equally high speed.

Shayne hit the brakes. He had recognized the driver of the other car. Jason Holman was going somewhere in a hurry.

Shayne turned the Buick around. He was going wherever Jason was.

The other car was a Mercedes, and Jason was pushing it for all it was worth. Shayne had no trouble keeping up, though, and from the feral look that had been on Jason's face, he didn't think that the young man was keeping too close an eye on his tail. He seemed too intent on arriving at his destination and committing some mayhem.

Shayne's icy grin spread as the two cars entered the Miami area again. Holman turned off the highway, and Shayne recognized the neighborhood. Unless he missed his guess, Jason was going to see Cal Herron. Shayne wondered why, then decided that he would find out soon enough. This was one party he was definitely going to crash.

Jason's car was several blocks ahead when Shayne saw it pull up in front of Herron's house. Shayne hung a quick right at a cross street and parked at the curb, out of sight of the house.

It was late enough in the morning now that the people who worked and the school children were all gone to their respective

places, and the neighborhood was quiet, almost deserted. Shayne heard a dog barking several blocks away as he walked back toward Herron's house.

Luckily, there were trees and hedges to give him some cover as he worked his way closer. He cut through a couple of back yards and found himself crouching under the same window as he had before. The room within was empty now, though. Shayne heard voices floating out of a window further toward the back of the house.

He moved over under it, being careful where he placed his feet. As he got closer, he could make out the voices coming from inside.

"What do you want, Herron? I don't have any business with you."

That was Jason. Shayne heard Herron laugh, then the loan shark said, "I think you do, Jason. But it's not what I want, it's what I *don't* want. I don't want your father to beat you to death with his bare hands, which is just what he'll do when I tell him that you arranged for your own sister's kidnapping."

Shayne edged his head up just over the sill. The room inside was Herron's den, where Shayne had been beaten, and Herron was seated behind the desk. Standing in front of the desk was Jason Holman, his face tight and angry.

"I don't know what the hell you're talking about," Jason

declared curtly, but he fooled no one. Even through the window, Shayne could see the dangerous panic in his eyes.

Herron sat up, his own face darkening. "Don't give me that garbage," he snapped. "There was only a couple of thousand dollars in that case where there was supposed to be two hundred and fifty thousand. You're the one who got it together, so what happened to the rest of it?"

"How do you know that?" Jason demanded. "Just who are you? All you told me on the phone was your name and that you knew who had kidnapped Marcy."

Herron laughed. "I'm somebody who knows more about the high and mighty Holmans than you'd ever believe, kid. I know you must have pulled something that lost a lot of your daddy's money and you wanted to cover it up. So you hired a couple of guys to snatch your sister. You fixed up the phony ransom, and you thought everything was going to be fine."

Shayne and Herron had arrived at the same theory, and Shayne could tell by the look on Jason's face that it was true. The blood drained from Jason's features. In a strangled voice, Jason asked, "How — how did you know?"

"Let's just say a little bird and I figured it out," Herron replied.

Yeah, Shayne mused from his position outside, a little bird named Barbara.

"What is it you want from me now?" Jason asked forlornly.

"What else? Money, friend, money." Herron smirked. "Ten thousand now, ten thousand next month, you get the idea."

Jason was aghast. "Where will I get that kind of money?"

Herron shrugged. "Same place you got that two hundred and fifty grand you lost, I guess. Otherwise, I tell your father the whole story."

Something occurred to Jason, and he paled even more. "I heard on the radio that the boat had been found and that the two men on it were dead. You killed them!"

"I'll bet you were wondering what happened to them; weren't you? Listen, Holman, I went to a lot of trouble to get that money, and then it wasn't even there! It was all a fake! I don't like that. I feel kind of like you cheated me, Jason. I can't let you get away with that."

"But I can't come up with ten thousand every month!"

Malice twisted Herron's face. "You'd better. Just be glad I didn't ask you to fork over more."

Sweat was running down Jason's face. He wiped at it with a shaking hand, then reached inside his coat as if reaching for a handkerchief.

Neither Shayne nor Herron expected him to come back out with a gun.

Herron snapped, "What the hell?"

Jason held the small pistol out in front of him. "I'm not going to let a hoodlum like you ruin everything," he said. "I'll kill you first."

"You're crazy!"

"No, I'm not. But everything is all right now. The loss is covered up and Marcy is safe. That's all that matters. And if I have to shoot you to keep it that way, I will."

Outside, Shayne slipped his own gun out of its holster. It was about time for him to take a hand in this game. He could tell by the way Jason held the gun that he wasn't used to it, but he also knew that a nervous novice is sometimes the most dangerous man alive.

Herron said slowly, "All right; all right, just a minute. There's no need to go around shooting people." He stood up carefully, not wanting to spook Jason. "I'm sure we can work something out."

"No... No, I don't think so. If I let you live, you might try this again later. I can't take that chance, Herron."

Herron's fingers rested lightly on a heavy glass paperweight sitting on the desk. He sighed and said, "Whatever you say, Holman." Then in one smooth motion, he flipped the paperweight at Jason.

Jason ducked and tried to bring the gun to bear on the now-rapidly-moving Herron. But the loan shark was around the desk in

a flash. His fist lashed out, catching Jason on the jaw. Herron's other hand grappled for the gun.

It came free as Jason staggered under another blow. Herron reversed it deftly and pointed it at Jason, whose eyes were widening in horror. He started to cry out, "No — " when the little pistol cracked flatly.

Shayne saw Jason spin around, grabbing at his shoulder, and then the redhead was raising up to his full height, sighting through the open window. He called out, "Herron!"

Herron whirled, bringing the pistol up to bear on Shayne, but the big detective fired first. The slug caught Herron in the stomach, doubling him over and knocking him backwards. He shrieked in pain.

Shayne sprinted for the front door of the house. Herron's men were probably around somewhere, and the gunplay would bring them running. He would have to move fast if he wanted to get Jason out of this alive, not to mention himself.

The door wasn't locked. It sprang open when he hit it. He found himself looking down a hall, and at the other end of it, alarm on his face, was Ernie, the man who held the rifle on him while Herron pistol-whipped him. That same rifle was in Ernie's hands now, and he jerked it to his shoulder when he saw Shayne.

Shayne got off the first shot again, drilling a neat hole in the pocket of Ernie's shirt. The rifle blasted into the floor as Ernie flipped over backwards.

Shayne pounded down the hall, drawn by the sound of moaning coming from behind one of the doors. He crashed into it and sent it flying open. Jason Holman was sitting on the floor, clutching his bloody shoulder and making noises of pain, while Cal Herron was curled up in front of the desk, making no noises at all. Shayne knew right away that he was dead.

He heard shouts and running footsteps and ducked back out into the hall. Herron's other two men had paused over Ernie's body. Shayne snapped a couple of shots at them, sending them diving for cover.

Stepping back into the den, Shayne said to Jason, "There's a phone on the desk. Get it and call the cops."

Jason took his hand away from his shoulder, stared at the blood on it, and began to whimper.

Shayne put his gun through the door and fired blindly down the hall, hoping to keep Herron's men pinned down. He grated, "Stop it! If you want to stay alive, Jason, call the cops like I told you!"

Shayne had to pause then to shove some fresh bullets into his gun, hoping that the others didn't take advantage of the lull to rush them. Jason tried to stand up, couldn't make it, and crawled

over to the desk, avoiding Herron's body with revulsion. He managed to get the operator on the phone and told her to get the police.

Shots came screaming into the room from outside, but they were all wild, hitting the wall a good ten feet from Shayne. He went down low and returned the fire as Jason gasped out the addresss to a startled desk sergeant who could hear the battle in the background.

Shayne jerked his head around and said, "Tell them to put you through to Will Gentry! When you get him, tell him all about the kidnapping and your part in it and what Herron did."

"I—I can't!"

"If you don't, I'll go out that window and leave you here, Jason." Shayne's grim tones affirmed the fact that he meant every word of it.

"I...I..."

A slug ricocheted through the room, whistling by Jason's head. He said urgently into the phone, "Put me through to Will Gentry, fast! I — I've got a message from Mike Shayne!"

Mike Shayne had a message for Herron's men, and he sent it by way of steel-jacketed bullets. This was turning into quite a firefight, and Shayne wished the cops would hurry. He barely heard Jason gasping out his confession into the phone behind him.

The hammer of his .38 clicked on an empty chamber. He cursed

and began to reload it, then heard the feet running down the hall toward them. He dropped the gun. It was too late to be reloading now.

Then his eyes fell on the little pistol that Jason had brought with him. It had fallen from Herron's hand and skidded under the desk.

Shayne yelled to Jason, "Get down!" and launched himself in a dive across the floor. His fingers wrapped around the butt of the pistol and then he was rolling to one side. A bullet plowed into the floor beside him as Herron's men charged into the doorway.

He felt a slug crease his ribs as he brought the gun up, and then he was pulling the trigger as fast as he could, filling the doorway with lead. There were twin cries of pain as the bullets hit home.

Herron's men fell back out of the door, and Shayne heard their guns hit the floor in the hall. He came to his feet and advanced cautiously, until he saw that there was no need to worry anymore. Both men, if not dead, would at least be out of action for a long time, plenty long enough for the cops to get there.

He heard the wail of sirens in the distance.

"Oh, Lord ..." Jason Holman said.

Shayne turned toward him and saw the spreading red stain on Jason's shirt. One of the flying bullets had taken him low in the

right side.

Shayne knelt beside him and looked at the wound. "You'll be all right," he said coldly. "You'll just bleed a lot."

It was callous and he knew it, but he couldn't find it in himself to feel any sympathy for Jason. Not after everything that had happened.

"It's not fair," Jason moaned. "I didn't really hurt anybody. None of it was my fault!"

Shayne stood up. "You'd better save your energy."

Jason looked up at him, wild-eyed. "It's all your fault, you bastard! If you hadn't poked your nose into this, everything would have been fine." His voice dropped as his strength ebbed out along with his blood. "When Dad called you, I got scared. I had the men let Marcy escape early. They were supposed to let her go after the payoff ... Oh, hell, it hurts ... It should have worked out, it all should have worked out ..."

"Yeah," Shayne said. "But it didn't."

XIII

SHAYNE SPENT THE REST of the day talking to the cops, Will Gentry in particular, and to Tim Rourke, and to Lucy, who wanted to know just why in the world did he keep getting shot at. Shayne would have like to know the answer to that one himself. He guessed it was just his own

natural aptitude for trouble.

Whatever, he mused late that afternoon, this one was over. Jason was in the hospital and would soon be behind bars, settling the matter of the kidnapping, and Herron's surviving henchmen would pay for their part in the murder of the two men on the boat.

At first, Jason had summoned up the strength to try to bluff his way through, claiming that Shayne had framed him, but that didn't last long. He broke down and spilled the whole story, how he had lost over two hundred thousand dollars in the commodities market in a matter of weeks, after Gerard had told him specifically not to get involved in any high-risk ventures.

Shayne was glad he hadn't been the one who had to tell the whole sordid story to Gerard Holman. He liked the old artist, and he knew that the man would be heartbroken by his son's treachery.

But not nearly as heartbroken as he would have been if something had happened to Marcy, Shayne reminded himself.

The only missing player was Barbara Masters, who had not been at Sandy Point when the police arrived. Maybe she had heard about what had happened at Herron's house and had taken off for the Midwest, where she had come from. At any rate, the cops were looking for her and Shayne had no doubts they would find her.

There would be criminal conspiracy and accessory to murder charges waiting for her when they did.

So it was over, and Shayne was glad, and the only thing he wanted to do as he settled back in his favorite chair with a tumbler of Martell was relax. The last forty-eight hours had been enough to drain anybody, even a big Irish shamus.

Someone knocked at the door.

Shayne suppressed the urge to groan, set the brandy down, and got up to answer it, wondering who it could be. Tim Rourke had gone out to Sandy Point to be with Marcy, and Will Gentry had been up to his broad behind in paperwork when Shayne left him at police headquarters an hour earlier. Lucy Hamilton had offered to come over and fix him dinner, but he had declined the offer with thanks, explaining that he wanted to make an early evening of it. And if Lucy came over, who knew when the evening would end.

He swung the door open and was only a little bit surprised to see Barbara Masters.

"The cops are looking for you," he said bluntly.

"I know. Can I come in?"

She wasn't carrying a gun, which Shayne had been halfway expecting, so he stepped back and waved her in. Of course, there could be a pistol in her purse ...

"I didn't expect you to show up

here," he said as he closed the door.

"I didn't know where else to go. I ... I thought you might help me."

There was a silent plea in her eyes as she looked at him. He couldn't deny that she looked lovely, in a long-sleeved beige dress that clung to her body and went well with her dark hair and brown eyes. It would take a lot more than she had to make him help her, though, after what she had been involved with.

"You should have thought twice. All I'll do for you is call the cops."

She dropped her purse on the sofa and stepped closer to him. The handbag didn't fall like it had a gun in it.

She didn't stop until she was mere inches from him. He could smell her perfume, felt the heat given off by her body. She said in almost a whisper, "I didn't kill anyone. All I want to do is go somewhere and start over. What's wrong with that?"

"What's wrong is that you helped get two men killed by telling Herron about the kidnapping. Hell, you might have even suggested that he kill them and take the ransom. That counts for something, even if they were just Jason's hired thugs. And then you and Herron tried to blackmail Jason."

Her face twisted for a split second, revealing hate and rage,

before she smoothed it over. "It wasn't fair that the Holmans had all the money and my side of the family didn't."

"Gerard worked for it. Anyway, I don't care why you did what you did, Barbara. You've got to pay the price, too, just like everybody else."

Her arms slid around his neck and she pressed herself to him. She lifted her lips to his, working her mouth against his desperately. It may have been survival instinct that prompted the kiss, but Shayne could feel passion in it, too.

She moved her head away an inch and whispered, "If you help me, you won't regret it."

"Yes, I think I would." His voice was flat, final.

Her face twisted again, and this time she spat, "Damn you!"

Shayne felt her hand moving at the back of his neck. He jerked away from her, tearing her arms loose, and felt a searing pain on the side of his neck. He planted a hand between her fine breasts and shoved, sending her staggering back several feet.

He put a hand to his neck and the fingers came away bloody. The knife in Barbara's hand was small but extremely sharp. The gash on his neck was proof of that. He had never expected her to be carrying a knife up her sleeve.

"You ruined everything!" she spat, unconsciously echoing what Jason had said earlier in the

day. "Cal is dead, and you killed him! I've got to run now, run for my life. Lord knows I didn't like living off the Holmans, but that was better than this. You — you bastard!" She launched into a hysterical list of curses that would have done credit to some sailors Shayne knew, all the while coming closer and closer to him, the knife held low before her, its point inscribing tiny circles in the air.

Somewhere in her life, she had learned how to use a knife. Shayne could tell that from the way she advanced. He watched her warily.

Suddenly, her blind rage got the better of her and she rushed at him with a scream, the knife upraised to slash down at him. He caught her wrist and twisted and the knife went sailing across the room. His other hand came up, balled into a loose fist, and clipped her chin, snapping her head back. She sagged forward into his arms, limp and unconscious.

Shayne dropped her on the sofa and stared down at her grimly for a moment before going to the telephone to call the police. He was getting damned tired of

people blaming him for things that weren't his fault.

AFTER THE POLICE had come and taken Barbara away, he finished his neglected tumbler of Martell and considered for a moment, then picked up the phone again.

"Angel," he said when Lucy Hamilton answered, "I've changed my mind. I'll be over to pick you up in a little bit, and we're going to go out and do the town."

"But Michael, I thought you were exhausted!"

"I am, Angel, but if I stay here, somebody else is liable to come knocking on my door, and I don't think I can stand any more company for a while!"

He said goodbye to a puzzled Lucy and headed for the bathroom to clean up the cut on his neck. Maybe a turtleneck shirt would be best, he considered; it would hide the wound. Because if Lucy saw it, she would want to know what happened, and then he would have to tell her that someone had tried to kill him again ... ●

Next month Mike Shayne returns in

THE GOLDEN BUDDHA CAPER
By Brett Halliday

Don't miss it!

Death And The Dancing Shadows

by James M. Reasoner

Markham's case started with a pornographic movie. After that came blackmail, murder, and a danger he didn't know existed!

IMAGES FLICKERED in the darkness.

I hesitated before going into the little screening room. The picture up on the screen was in black-and-white, circa 1940, born about the same time I was. Right at the moment, it was a long shot of an old-fashioned train barrelling

through a mesquite-dotted plain. Two figures were struggling on top of a boxcar.

As I watched, the camera cut to a medium close shot of the two fighters. Both wore western outfits, one of them in lighter shades, the other in dark. They were trading vicious punches that

should have knocked them off the train but didn't. A sky filled with fluffy white clouds rolled along behind them in a process-shot.

The man in dark clothes had a broad, ugly face with a thin black moustache. His hat was black, too, low and flatcrowned. His expression seemed to be frozen in a permanent leer. It was funny how his hat never came off, even when the other man punched him hard in the face.

That other man wore a white hat, and underneath it his face was strong, open, and handsome. You could tell just by looking at him that here was a good, honest man. I recognized him instantly as Eliot "Lucky" Tremaine, the man who had called me earlier in the day at my West Hollywood office and told me he wanted to hire me.

The fight was reaching a crucial point on the movie screen. The black-hatted villain, whom I had recognized as veteran B-movie heavy Paul McBain, had knocked Lucky Tremaine off his feet with a sneak punch. Lucky sprawled at the edge of the speeding boxcar, only a desperate grip saving him from going over. His leer growing wider McBain stepped closer and swung a booted foot at Lucky's head in a kick that would surely finish him off.

But Lucky ducked, grabbed that boot, and twisted. With a scream and a crescendo of background music, McBain staggered back-

wards and went off the other side of the train, just as it obligingly crossed a deep gorge.

The rest of the movie was the usual stuff, Lucky being reunited with the female lead of the picture and the promise of living happily ever after. I had been standing at the rear of the room for less than ten minutes when the studio's insignia flashed on the screen and then blank white leader flapped out of the projector.

There was a light switch just inside the door. I flipped it up, and when the fluorescent strips in the ceiling flashed on, I said, "Six-Gun Raiders, right?"

Eliot Tremaine was sitting in the middle of the third row of seats. He turned to look at me and said, "Right. We filmed it in nine days, with only half a script. The writer was too drunk to finish it, so the director and I made up the second half as we went along. How do you think it plays?"

"It plays good. Of course, it bears a certain resemblance to other films in the series."

Tremaine laughed. "Hell, all them pictures were alike. The fans didn't seem to care. You want some lunch, Markham? You *are* Markham, aren't you?"

"I'm Markham."

Eliot Tremaine stood up and went into the cubicle at the back of the room to shut off the projector. I couldn't help but think that he looked smaller in real life than he did on screen. I would

have recognized him anywhere, though. There were more lines on his face and more gray in the black hair, and his waist was quite a bit thicker, but he was still unmistakably Lucky Tremaine, hero of countless B westerns and Saturday afternoon serials.

I stepped aside to let him lead the way out of the screening room. It was a fairly new addition to the sprawling old ranch house. The rest of the house looked almost like a set from one of Lucky's old movies.

He was wearing boots, jeans, and a blue work shirt, and he looked more like a working rancher than he did the retired star of cowboy movies. He looked back over his shoulder at me and asked, "You don't mind eatin' in the kitchen, do you?"

"Not at all."

I was hungry. It was quite a drive out here into the valley to Tremaine's ranch, and the clock had gone around to a little after noon. If he wanted to postpone telling me why he wanted to hire a private detective, that was his business and all right with me.

We went out into the kitchen, his boots clopping on the tile floor. The white-haired lady who had let me into the house and directed me to the screening room was taking a roast out of the oven. Tremaine pulled out a chair at the table, waved me to another one, and said, "Could you whip us up a couple of sandwiches out of that

roast beef, Mrs. Rankin?"

"Of course, Mr. Tremaine," she replied in her soft voice, and I wondered idly if there was more between them than an employer-housekeeper relationship.

The hot roast beef sandwiches were good. We washed them down with a can of cold beer apiece, then Tremaine clasped his big rough hands on the table in front of him and said, "I guess you wonder why I want to hire you, Markham."

"I figured you would tell me whenever you were ready."

He fixed his direct gaze on me. Those clear blue eyes were more powerful in real life than they had ever been staring into a camera. "You're supposed to be a good man for handlin' delicate matters. At least that's what the county sheriff told me, and he got the word from a friend of yours on the L.A. force."

"I do my best."

"Come back to the movie room with me. There's something I want you to see."

He kept talking as we went back through the house. "I made my last movie in 1953. One hundred and forty-two pictures in a little over fifteen years. You seen many of 'em?"

"Quite a few. Old movies are all they show on TV in the middle of the night."

"Ain't it the truth. Anyway, when I saw the way things were going in the industry, I told myself

it was time to quit. I had saved my money. I never was one to live high and fancy. So my wife and I bought this ranch."

We went into the screening room. Tremaine paused at the projection booth, taking a film carton off a shelf. He removed the reel from it and began threading the film into the projector with practiced ease. He went on, "I watch my pictures a lot. I suppose that seems vain. But it ain't, really. I just like to see something that reminds me of the way things used to be in Hollywood. Good, clean, excitin' stories with a hero and without all this trashy stuff they put in today. You go to the movies much, Markham?"

"Tickets cost too much. I can't afford it." I didn't really want to get into a discussion of morality in the movies with him.

He had the projector ready to go, but he didn't turn it on. Instead, he said, "My wife died not long after we bought this place. I raised our boy pretty much by myself. I worried about him not having a mother around, but he turned out all right. Married a fine girl and had a daughter of his own. He and his wife were killed in a car wreck five years ago. The little girl was thirteen then. Get the lights, will you, Markham?"

I snapped them off, and he turned the projector on. There were no credits on this film and no dialogue. The soundtrack was

raucous, driving music. The actors were three young men and a beautiful brown-haired girl in her late teens. They were all naked.

"That's my granddaughter Stacy," Eliot Tremaine said in a voice that trembled just slightly.

"You don't have to show me all of it, Mr. Tremaine."

He cut the projector off and I turned the lights back on. With motions that were automatic and detached, he began to rewind the film. His face was set in a tight mask.

"That came in the mail yesterday," he said. "There was an unsigned note with it saying that the film hadn't been released yet, but that it would be, with plenty of publicity about who Stacy really is, unless I show up at five o'clock today in the bus depot in Los Angeles with ten thousand dollars in a brief case — in exchange for the only other copy of the film."

I told him bluntly, "There're probably a dozen copies of it, Mr. Tremaine."

The mask on his face sagged, and suddenly he looked his age: "I know that, Markham. But I don't know what else to do. Stacy's all the family I've got left."

It was a messy situation, with no good solutions that I could see. I said, "The best thing for you to do would be to turn the film and the note over to the police. It would be rough, but it would probably do the least damage in

the long run."

"I thought of that — " He smacked a fist into an open palm. " — but I just can't bring myself to do it. I have to protect her if I can."

"Do you have the money?"

"Yeah. Enough for this time. It'll run out sooner or later, though, and then where will Stacy be?"

I hated to see the man going through this. He wasn't really what I would call one of the heroes of my youth, but he seemed to be a good man, and I had seen a lot of his movies and enjoyed them. I decided I wanted to help him if I could.

"Have you talked to Stacy about this?" I asked.

"I tried to call her last night. That's another thing that's got me real worried. She's a freshman at USC, and her roommate in the dorm told me that Stacy hasn't been around for the last three days."

I felt a little cold prickle on the back of my neck. That didn't sound good. I thought for a moment and then said, "All right. Here's what we'll do. You be at the bus terminal at five just like you're supposed to be, but don't take the money. I'll be there covering you. Tell whoever contacts you that you've decided not to pay."

Tremaine started to protest, but I held up a hand and stopped him. "I'll trail the blackmailer and do

what I can to get him off your back, short of killing him, that is."

"What about Stacy?"

"I'm heading back to L.A. right now. I'll have a couple of hours to check around before that five o'clock meeting. I'll need to know where she lives and the name of her roommate."

Tremaine gave me the information and I wrote it down in my notebook. We discussed my fee briefly, settling on a figure that satisfied both of us. Then I shook hands with him, admiring his firm grip, and headed back toward the city of the angels.

THE DRIVE along the freeways didn't take much concentration, traffic being fairly light on a weekday afternoon. My mind was free to occupy itself with Lucky Tremaine and his problem.

Stacy Tremaine had been at USC for a semester-and-a-half, staying in reasonably close contact with her grandfather, with whom she had made her home after her parent's death. She had visited the ranch often, at least until recently. Tremaine also thought that she was doing well in her studies.

It seemed like a very good possibility that the film had been produced somewhere in the Los Angeles area. It was also a good bet that whoever had produced the film was the would-be blackmailer as well. The stuff had probably been shot with that in mind, rather

than as the commercial pornography it resembled.

Right now, my best course of action would be to isolate the blackmailer and throw a scare into him, try to get him to abandon the scheme. If that failed, Tremaine would have little choice but to either go to the police or pay off and keep paying off as long as he could. Whatever happened, I wanted to find Stacy and set his mind to rest about her safety.

I got back to the city a little before three and stopped at my office long enough to call a sergeant I knew on the Vice Squad and ask him about porno movie-making in the area.

"You got all day?" he asked, and I could almost see his shrug. "It goes on all the time, and we do our best to stop it, but there's just too much. Anybody with a camera and some willing bodies can make the stuff."

Naturally, he wanted to know why I was asking, but I stalled him off and headed for the university. I wanted to have a talk with Stacy Tremaine's roommate before five o'clock.

The dormitory Stacy lived in was set in the middle of a big lawn dotted with trees. It was a very nice setting. I parked my Ford not too far away and strolled back to it among well-dressed students. Out of place is a mild description of the way I felt.

It had been a hell of a long time since I had called for a girl in a

college dorm, but it looked like it still worked the same way. I gave my name to a coed behind a desk in the lobby and asked to see Beverly Graham. I was surprised when she gave me the room number and told me to go on up.

The room was on the second floor. I could hear quite a few female voices as I walked down the hall, and I discovered that I felt vaguely uncomfortable. It had been a long time.

Beverly Graham turned out to be a tall, angular blonde with glasses and a very nice smile. When she answered my knock on the door, I told her who I was and that I was working for Eliot Tremaine. "I was wondering if you could give me some information about Stacy," I finished.

"Sure," she said and gave me that nice smile. "Come on in."

She was wearing jeans and a USC sweatshirt. She sat on one of the neatly made twin beds and I took a straight-backed chair next to a desk. "When was the last time you saw Stacy?" I asked.

"It was Sunday afternoon. I'd been home for the weekend, but I got back here about four in the afternoon. Stacy was here then, but she went out a few minutes after I got here. She didn't say where she was going, and she never came back."

"Did she seem to be upset about anything?"

"No. But then we're not what you would call close friends."

"Meaning you didn't confide in each other?"

"No, not very often."

Beverly seemed to be a nice girl, but it looked like she was going to be no help at all in locating Stacy. I said, "Has Stacy ever disappeared like this before?"

"Not since we've been roommates."

"Do you know if the police have been notified?"

Beverly shrugged. "I haven't called them. The dorm director knows that Stacy is gone, of course. She may have called the police. I just don't know."

"Do you know who Stacy's friends are, someone she might go to stay with?"

"Not really. To tell the truth, I never saw much of Stacy. She didn't hang around here much."

This was getting me nowhere fast. I looked around the tidy little room with its bright curtains and well-filled bookcases. There was a picture of Lucky Tremaine as he had appeared in his movies on the desk. I stood up and said, "Thanks for your time, Miss Graham. I'm sure Stacy will turn up."

"I didn't help you very much, did I?"

Something prompted me to be honest. "No, I'm afraid not."

I saw a shadow of concern flicker over her face. "I really would hate for anything bad to happen to Stacy."

"So would I."

I still had some time before the five o'clock meeting at the bus terminal, so I asked around in the lobby downstairs and located several girls who knew Stacy Tremaine. None of them were able to give me any useful information, though. Evidently Stacy was a girl who had kept pretty much to herself, a legacy, perhaps, of spending the last few years on the ranch with her grandfather.

I went back to my car and drove toward downtown L.A., parking two blocks away from the terminal. The place was busy, as usual, and I didn't think I would have any trouble blending into the crowd. It was a little after four-thirty.

AT FIVE O'CLOCK, Eliot Tremaine walked through the big front doors. He was wearing a dark blue business suit now but still had his boots on. There was a black briefcase in his hand. I hoped that he had followed my suggestions and that it was empty.

I was sitting on a bench with a newspaper, between an elderly man and a girl with a small baby. I watched as unobtrusively as I could as Tremaine walked slowly through the big room. He kept his eyes straight ahead.

He had come about halfway across the room toward my position when another man approached him from the side. The man put out a hand and spoke

to him, too softly for me to hear. Tremaine stopped.

The exchange was interesting. I couldn't overhear any of what was said, but I could see their faces. Tremaine's was flushed and set in angry lines. I could tell that he was barely able to contain his emotions. The other man was calm at first, but he too began to look angry, undoubtedly right after Tremaine told him that he didn't have the money.

I had never seen the man before. He was around thirty, dressed casually, with dark curly hair and a moustache. He spoke sharply to Tremaine as I watched, then turned quickly on his heel and stalked away.

I thought for a second that Tremaine was going to go after him. I got to my feet quickly and hurried toward the former cowboy actor, hoping to forestall any hasty action on his part. By the time I got there, though, he had visibly regained control of himself.

"That filth," he said when he saw me. "That utter filth."

There was the same deadly intensity in his voice as there had been when he faced down a score of movie bad guys. Only this time it was for real.

"Settle down," I said. "Was that him?"

"It was. He wanted to know if I had the money. I told him I didn't."

"What did he say then?"

"That he was sorry, it was too

bad the world would have to know Lucky Tremaine's granddaughter was a porno star."

I didn't have time to talk anymore. I said quickly, "I'll handle it now. You go back to the ranch. I'll be in touch."

"Did you find Stacy yet?"

I shook my head and hurried away. I didn't want to look at the pain and worry that were etching themselves on his rugged face.

When I hit the sidewalk, the blackmailer was just getting into a ten-year-old Cadillac. I made a mental note of the license number, then hurried around the block to my own car. I caught up-with him at a red light-four blocks later.

Trailing him wasn't hard. He wasn't expecting to be followed. From the looks of him in the terminal, he wasn't a professional at this sort of thing. That made my hopes of scaring him off go up.

I followed him to an apartment complex not far from the university. He parked the Caddy and got out as I cruised by. He still looked mad. I parked in the next block and walked back.

With my hands in my pockets, I sauntered past his car and glanced in through the open window. There was a film can lying on the front seat.

There didn't seem to be anyone around. I reached in and plucked the can off the seat almost without pausing. As I strolled on into the courtyard of the complex, I turned it over in my hands and examined

it. A piece of tape with the name *Stewart* on it was stuck to one side.

That was a stroke of luck. The row of mailboxes next to the manager's apartment told me that an H. Stewart lived in Apartment 106. That was on the first floor, at the far end of the courtyard.

I opened the can as I walked toward H. Stewart's apartment. There was a reel of film inside. I pulled one end of it loose and held it up, seeing the cloudy darkness of blank, exposed film. Tremaine's ten thousand would have bought him exactly nothing.

I snapped the can shut and knocked on the door of Apartment 106. It took H. Stewart almost a minute to answer it.

He had shed his sports coat, but it was the same man, the same moustache and bushy hair. He looked at me blankly, traces of anger and tension still visible on his face, and said curtly, "Yeah?"

I held up the film can and said, "Tremaine wouldn't have gotten his money's worth, would he?"

His eyes widened and he said, "Where'd you get —"

I interrupted him by putting my free hand on his chest and pushing. He took an involuntary step back into the apartment, with me following closely. I shut the door behind me with my foot.

"You can't just barge in here," he began to bluster.

"Blackmail is against the law, too."

That shut him up for a second. He was confused and a little bit scared, and he didn't know what to make of me.

Music was coming from another room, music I had heard before, and with it was the sound of a movie projector. A girl's voice called out, "Who was it, Hal?"

Somehow, I knew. I felt my heart sinking right down into my stomach. I pointed a finger at Stewart and said, "Tell her to come out here."

He looked like he wanted to argue, but I guess my expression was pretty bleak right then. He swallowed and said over the music, "Come out here a minute, Stacy."

She appeared in the doorway to the other room, wearing a halter top and cutoff jeans. Beyond question, she was a lovely girl. That didn't stop me from disliking her on sight.

Her smooth brow furrowed in a frown when she saw me. She asked Stewart, "Who's this?"

I answered her. "I'm the guy your grandfather hired to help you, Miss Tremaine. Only it looks like you don't need any help."

"Listen, you'd better get out of here," Stewart said, "or I'll call the cops."

"Fine. I'm sure they'd love to nail you for blackmail and making porno movies."

Stacy came closer to me; her gaze cool and appraising. She

said, "I'll bet you're a private detective. Good old Lucky. Something goes wrong with his little world and who does he call on for help? Another hack movie cliche."

My dislike for her was growing rapidly. I said wearily, "Why would you want to hurt him, Miss Tremaine? He loves you very much."

There was bitterness in her voice as she said, "Do you know what it's like to have to watch old movies day after day and listen to an old man lecture on the evils of today's morality? Hell, I figure he deserves whatever he gets, and we might as well make some money out of it, hadn't we?"

There was no way I could answer her. If she and her grandfather lived in two different worlds, at least I was a lot closer to his than hers. I could see now that Stewart wasn't the driving force in this business. Trying to scare Stacy Tremaine off would be futile. She was beyond being scared by me.

"Go ahead and call the cops, Hal," she suddenly said. "We'll admit it all, and let the old man's heart break. Might as well get it over if he's not going to pay."

She was probably bluffing, but I didn't feel like calling it. "Don't bother," I said. "I'm leaving."

"What are you going to tell Lucky?"

"Not to waste his money or his love on you. He won't believe me,

but it's all I can do."

She laughed, and there was a slight cutting edge of hysteria to it. "It doesn't matter. I never expected to get too much out of the old man. There's other ways to go. We can always get money."

I turned my back on her and walked out of the apartment, anger and disgust making me feel sick. I was halfway back to my car before I realized that I was still holding the film can tightly in my hand.

I paused on the sidewalk and looked at it, thinking that it was as worthless as whatever was in Stacy Tremaine's heart, when a car door opened and closed behind me and a hard voice said, "Give me the film."

I started to turn my head to look at the speaker. He snapped, "Don't turn around. Just reach around behind you with the film."

I was in no mood for this. I said, "What the hell?" and started to turn around anyway. I wasn't expecting what happened next.

Something hit me on the head.

It sounds simple, but it wasn't. Lights flashed and sirens went off and the film can slipped from my fingers.

After that, I don't remember a thing, at least not for a while.

I WAS in another screening room when I woke up. The overhead lights were out, but the screen was lit with a brilliant white light. It stabbed into my

eyes and right on into my brain. I had a headache to start with from being hit, and the light didn't help it any.

Somebody was fumbling with something in the back of the room and cursing as he had trouble with it. I started to turn my head and look in that direction when something round and hard poked into the back of my neck and a quiet voice said, "Eyes front, please."

I kept my eyes front. The soft voice went on, "We're going to take a look at that film you had, Mr Markham. I want to see what I'm buying this time."

I wished that my head didn't hurt so bad, because whoever this was, he had just given me several things to think about. He had obviously gone through my wallet and found out my name, and just as obviously, he thought I was part of the blackmail scheme. His words implied that he had made at least one payoff already. It looked as if Stacy Tremaine and Hal Stewart had more than one pigeon. If the man sitting behind me had already bought a blank film from them, he was probably in no mood now to haggle with someone he thought was one of the blackmailers, namely me. I had to convince him otherwise.

"Look," I ventured, "you've got this all wrong — "

"Shut up. I want to see this film first." The sound of his voice changed, and I could tell that he

had turned his head. "Haven't you got that projector going yet?"

Another voice, harder and slower, answered, "Not yet. This crazy thing always gives me trouble."

The man right behind me spoke to someone else. "Go give him a hand."

A few minutes went by, and still the film didn't roll. Every time I tried to say something, the guy behind me told me to shut up. Finally I decided to keep quiet for the time being.

One of the men in the back of the room called out, "You'll have to help us with this, boss. We can't make this projector work."

The man behind me cursed under his breath and then said, "All right. Just a minute." To me, he said, "Don't try anything. I'm a good shot, and I'd just as soon kill you and get it over with, now that I know where the other two are."

I didn't like the sound of that at all. I had the feeling that he would be even less happy when he saw that the film was blank.

I didn't move while he went back to the projection booth. There were three of them and only one of me. Besides, I didn't even know where I was.

They got the projector running after a few minutes. My estimation of the head man's reaction when he saw the blank screen was right.

The gun in his hand bounced off

the side of my head as the lights came on. I yelled, "Dammit!" and started to my feet. Strong hands grabbed me and pushed me back down.

"You must be pretty damn stupid, Markham, to think you could sell me a blank film twice. Did you honestly think I wouldn't have your boy Stewart followed after the first payoff? I want the real films, and I want them now!"

Slowly, I put my fingers to my head and felt blood oozing from the gash his gun had opened up. "You've got it all wrong," I grated. "You've been through my stuff. You know I'm a private cop. I've seen the films you're talking about, but I didn't have anything to do with blackmailing you!"

"No? Then why were you at Stewart's place? There was another payoff set for six o'clock. Are you trying to tell me you weren't on your way there when we grabbed you?"

My head throbbed. "That's exactly what I'm trying to tell you. I didn't know anything about a six o'clock meeting. I was hired to stop the blackmailers."

"Hired by who?"

"Someone who wants to protect the girl in the film. That's all I can tell you."

"It's not nearly enough. I don't believe you. Now you're going to tell us where the real films are."

He wasn't going to believe anything—I said as long as I was denying any involvement with the

blackmail scheme. I sighed wearily and said, "All right. They're in Stewart's apartment. I'll show you. Let's get over there and get it over with."

"What's to stop me from getting rid of you now?"

"I could be lying. Hadn't you better keep me alive until you've checked it out?"

He was silent for a moment as he thought it over. Then he said, "Come on. We'll all go. And you'd better be telling the truth, Markham."

All I wanted was to get out of this little screening room so that I would have some room to maneuver. I stood up and turned around, this time meeting no opposition. For the first time, I saw the man who had been holding the gun on me.

He was a little shorter than me and about the same age. His hair had gone prematurely silver. The revolver in his hand didn't go too well with the expensive suit he wore. I could have sworn I had seen him somewhere before.

Flanking him were two bigger men who had the look of not-too-bright hired help. They closed in on me and the man with the gun said, "Don't give us any trouble, Markham."

I wasn't planning to — yet.

With the two big men on either side of me and the man with the gun behind, we walked out of the screening room and into a hall. From the looks of things, we were

in a fairly expensive home.

It only took a few seconds to walk down the hall and out the front door. My guess was right. Even though darkness had fallen, I could tell we were in a fashionable neighborhood. A Lincoln Continental was parked in the driveway, and that's where we headed.

The man with the gun opened the rear door and said, "You and I will ride back here." He got in first, keeping the gun trained on me.

It looked like the best chance I was going to get. My foot lashed out against the car door, slamming it shut and trapping the man's arm. He let out a howl and dropped the gun.

I rammed a shoulder into one of the other men, knocking him backwards. There was welcoming darkness in an adjacent yard only a few feet away, and I sprinted for it. I heard the man shout, "Get him!"

I plunged through a hedge and ducked into the shadows alongside a garage. The two big men were blundering after me. It was easy to keep track of where they were and manage to be somewhere else. I kept working my way slowly away from them.

Thirty minutes later I was walking along a boulevard and looking for a phone. I found one outside of a convenience store and called a cab. My aching head was ready for this night to be over, but there were still things to do.

MY ABDUCTORS had left me my wallet, so I was able to pay the cab driver when he dropped me off at my two room office. I wanted to give Eliot Tremaine a call, since he was probably waiting on pins and needles to hear from me.

It was worse than that. He was waiting on my doorstep.

He stood up when he saw me, looking as haggard as I felt. I said, "I thought I told you to go back to the ranch."

"I started to," he said. "I got halfway there before I decided to come back. I wanted to be able to see Stacy tonight if you found her."

I put my key in the lock and twisted it. "I found her."

"Well, my God, Markham," he said, gripping my arm, "is she all right?"

"She's not hurt. At least not physically." I couldn't find the words to tell him. He was staring at me imploringly. I shrugged and said, "Hell, come on in."

He followed me in and stood there as I sat down wearily behind the grey metal desk. I said, "You won't like it."

"Tell me anyway."

I told him. Every bit of it. I told him that Stacy had been a willing participant in the film and that she might have even planned the whole thing. I told him that she and Stewart were blackmailing other people besides him. He stood there and took it, his face slowly turning to granite.

"So that's where it stands," I finished.

He stood there silently for a moment, then said, "I'll write you a check for your time, and then you're fired. I don't want you workin' for me no more."

"I was afraid you'd feel like that. You don't believe a word of what I said, do you?"

"Not one damn word. I'll find somebody else to help me and Stacy."

"Whatever you want."

He scribbled out a check and dropped it on my desk, then turned and walked out of the office without another word. I felt like hell. The job had been a complete bust from the first, and I had wound up having to hurt a man that I liked and admired. Lucky Tremaine deserved better.

I didn't feel like going back to my apartment. I stretched out on the cot in the back room, thinking that my head hurt way too much for me to sleep.

I was wrong.

It was a little after seven when I woke up the next morning. I was groggy and stiff from spending the night on the cot, but my head felt a little better. I ran a hand over my raspy jaw and decided that the first thing I had better do was pick up my car so that I could go home and clean up.

Another taxi took me back to the street near Stewart's apartment where I had left my Ford the

afternoon before. It was still there.

The neighborhood was beginning to wake up. It was nearly time to go to work for most of these people. I had just unlocked the front door of the Ford when the neighborhood woke up even more.

Someone started screaming.

It was coming from the direction of the apartment house where Hal Stewart lived. Frowning, I told myself not to worry about it. It was none of my business anymore.

I told myself that for about two seconds. Then I started running in the direction of the screams.

I could tell before I got there that the screams were coming from Apartment 106. Some of the people from the other apartments were sticking their heads out, but no one was making a move toward 106. I pounded up to it and grabbed the knob. The door was unlocked.

Hal Stewart was lying on the floor near the little makeshift projection room. From the size of the bloodstain growing on his chest, I knew he was either dead or soon would be. I sniffed the air. It hadn't been long since he was shot.

And Stacy Tremaine was standing over him, screaming and holding a gun.

I walked across the room toward her, moving slowly so as not to alarm her. She put up no resistance as I plucked the gun from her hand. In fact, she didn't

seem to be taking any notice of me at all. I let her scream while I looked for the phone.

It wouldn't take the police long to get there. As soon as I had hung up, I began to look around the apartment. There was an empty film can on the floor of the projection room. The projector wasn't running, but when I touched a finger to the big bulb, it was hot. It looked like they had been watching movies, and I thought I knew which one.

A couple of uniformed officers were the first to arrive, and they summoned a homicide lieutenant, a technical crew, and the Medical Examiner. The apartment got pretty crowded in the next hour.

The homicide lieutenant's name was Hoskins. I knew him slightly. I gave him all the facts I had, all the details of the blackmail scheme. He was younger than me and wanted to know who the hell Lucky Tremaine was.

By mid-morning, Stacy Tremaine had been booked for Hal Stewart's murder. A search of the apartment had turned up three copies of the film. I went downtown with Hoskins, sat in an uncomfortable chair in his office and said to him, "You know, it's very likely that the girl didn't kill Stewart."

He looked at me with his face a mixture of skepticism and weariness. "What are you talking about, Markham? I've been on duty for fourteen hours now.

You're not trying to make more work for me, are you?"

"What would Stacy's motive be?"

"Lover's quarrel, maybe? It doesn't make any difference, Markham. Their neighbors there in the apartment house place the shot at approximately twenty until eight. You get there at fifteen till and find the girl standing over the body with a gun. What more do you want?"

"What about the blackmail scheme? What about the guys who grabbed me yesterday?" It seemed to me that Hoskins was being unnecessarily stubborn in looking for the easy way out.

"We're trying to identify the three boys in that film. When we do, maybe we'll have a lead to whoever roughed you up. You can press kidnapping and assault charges then."

I fingered my still-sore head. "You're damn-right I will."

Hoskins let me hang around until he got a report on the three young men in the film. While we were waiting, he told me what Stacy Tremaine had said in her statement.

"She claims she had passed out from too much wine and marijuana. She and Stewart were going at it pretty good, and she says she doesn't remember anything after about midnight. According to her, the gunshot woke her up this morning, but by the time she came out of her fog

enought to know what was going on, there was nobody there but Stewart, and he was already dead with the gun laying beside him. She claims she picked it up without thinking. Except for a few of yours, her prints are the only ones on it."

"Whose gun was it?" I asked.

"It's registered in Stewart's name. By the way, if you're interested, until today he ran a little camera shop. Making porno films was just a sideline."

An officer came in then with a folder, which he handed to Hoskins. Inside there were some photos and typed sheets.

He scanned them quickly and then said, "This looks like what you wanted to see, Markham." He handed it across the desk to me. "I thought that the three guys in the film might be students at USC, since the girl was."

They all went to USC, all right, all sons of wealthy, respectable families. Ideal targets for a blackmail scheme. Their fathers were a banker, a judge, and an electronics tycoon.

That last one jogged something in my memory. I looked at the boy's picture more closely and read his name on the back: Jeffrey Wayne Olney. Son of industrialist Raymond Olney. Now I knew why the man with the gun had looked vaguely familiar. I had seen his picture in the business section of the paper not long before.

Hoskins still wasn't too sure he

believed my story, and he advised me not to push the charges against someone who could afford high-priced lawyers. I could see the logic in that, but it didn't make my head any less sore.

I convinced Hoskins to check on Olney's alibi, if any, for the time of Stewart's death, and also on the alibis of everyone else involved in the film. He grumbled about it but agreed to do it.

"Now it's time you got out of here, Markham, and let me get back to work. We do have some physical facts to base this case on, you know."

"I know," I agreed grudgingly. Despite what I had said earlier, I knew the odds were good that Stacy had indeed killed Stewart. I wanted to believe she was innocent, for Lucky's sake, but it was hard to deny the things I had seen with my own eyes. It was possible that someone else had pulled the trigger and then ducked out, leaving Stacy to take the blame, but it wasn't very likely.

I told Hoskins I'd be checking with him later and went out into the corridor outside his office. Lucky Tremaine was sitting in a chair, waiting for the Lieutenant to interview him.

I stopped and said, "Mr. Tremaine ... I'm sorry."

He looked up at me, eyes as hard as chips of agate, and said, "Some detective you are."

"Yeah," I agreed softly. "Some

detective I am."

I WENT BACK to my apartment for the first time in over twenty-four hours, shaved, showered, and took a two hour nap. When I woke up, I felt quite a bit better, at least physically. I made myself a sandwich and then got Hoskins on the phone.

The first thing he said was, "Maybe you were right, Markham. I've talked to Raymond Olney, and he acts like a man who's got something to hide. He's got an alibi for this morning though; he was home under sedation. Seems he picked up a broken arm somewhere last night."

"What about his men?"

"They alibi each other. You know how much that's worth."

I felt some hope at his words. If someone could prove that Stacy Tremaine was innocent of murder, then at least Lucky wouldn't have to live out the rest of his life with the knowledge that his granddaughter was a killer.

"It goes against the evidence," Hoskins was saying, "but I suppose it's just possible that one of Olney's men could have gone in there, shot Stewart, grabbed the film, and slipped away just before you got there. Still, we have to go with the evidence as it is, and that means the Tremaine girl."

"You still think I shouldn't press charges against Olney?"

"It would be your word against

his, Markham. Who do you think most people would believe?"

We both knew the answer to that one. Olney wouldn't be getting away completely unscathed, though. His son's part in the film would be common knowledge soon enough. That's the kind of thing that gets around. I was still a little disgruntled. It hadn't been the kid who had hit me in the head.

Something else Hoskins had mentioned was catching in my brain. I said, "What was that about grabbing the film? I thought you found three copies of it."

"That's the one thing that doesn't really jibe," he answered. "The girl has admitted freely to the blackmail plan, and she says there were four copies of the film. We found three of them, but that leaves one copy missing."

He was right. I remembered the empty film can on the floor now. I said, "doesn't that do something to your case?"

"The District Attorney doesn't think so. He thinks we can go with the physical evidence that was there and get a conviction. You'll be glad to know that he's decided to drop the charge to manslaughter, though."

The D.A. was probably right, I thought glumly. He was likely to get a conviction, unless something else turned up. I thanked Hoskins for the information, urged him to keep checking on Olney, and hung up.

I didn't feel like going into the office. One of the virtues of being self-employed is the ability to give in to such feelings. So I fixed myself another sandwich, heavy on the peanut butter this time, snapped on the television set, and stretched out on the sofa.

The audio came on before the picture. A very familiar voice was saying, "Drop those guns and reach for the sky, hombre."

It was a Lucky Tremaine movie.

I had seen it before, and my mind started to wander.

It wandered a long way.

THE SCREENING ROOM was dark again, just as it had been the morning before. The projector was humming along, throwing its images on the screen. The film was *Riders on the Wind*, possibly the best of the Lucky Tremaine series.

The star was sitting in the darkness watching himself. Something kept me from interrupting right then. I stood in the back of the room and let the scene play itself out.

Up on the screen, a much younger Lucky was riding along slowly, talking to a young boy who rode beside him. I didn't remember the child actor's name, but I remembered seeing the scene before.

"But you're the bravest man I know!" the boy was enthusing.

"Bein' brave ain't all that makes a man," Lucky responded.

"Bein' a man is a mixture of a whole bunch of things, Joey. Bravery's only part of it. There's carin' about other people, and bein' a good citizen, and takin' responsibility for whatever you do. Bein' scared ever so often don't make a fella any less of a man. Not if he goes ahead and does what he knows to be right."

I snapped the lights on. "Those are good words, Lucky. Who wrote them?"

Tremaine jerked his head around to look at me. When he had gotten over his initial surprise at seeing me there, he said, "I put that dialogue in myself."

"I thought maybe you did. Do you still believe what it said?"

"Yes, sir, I do."

"Even the part about taking responsibility for your actions?"

He frowned. "Just what are you gettin' at, Markham?"

I looked up at the images on the screen. They weren't people anymore. The bright fluorescent lights had washed them out so that they were only shadows now, dancing aimlessly in a world that no longer existed. I said, "Were you really going to let Stacy take the blame for a murder you committed?"

He stood up, his body breaking into the beam thrown by the projector. "You're crazy. You'd better just get outta here."

"Not just yet, Lucky." I took the reel of film from under my coat. "You should have gotten rid

of this while you had the chance, instead of leaving it in your bedroom."

He had aged a lot since the first time I had seen him. Now I would have had trouble recognizing him. He replied heavily, "I reckoned somebody would figure it out. I should've known it would be you."

"It was only luck that put me on to you," I said. "Stewart was watching the film just before he was killed. Afterwards, that copy of the film was gone. The killer had only a couple of minutes to rewind the film and get it out of the projector. I happened to know that the only other good suspects in the case were very clumsy with projectors. There was no way they could have taken the film in that amount of time. And then I remembered watching you work the projector here at the ranch."

"I thought maybe that was the only copy of the film. I didn't have time to look for any more." He sat down and rubbed his eyes, looking very tired. "It was kind of an accident, Markham. After I talked to you at your office, I drove around the town all night. I sure didn't want to believe what you'd told me, but I couldn't figure out why you'd lie about it. So when it got to be mornin', I looked up this Stewart's address in a phone book and went to see him."

A shudder ran through Lucky's body, but he continued, "Stacy

was there, all right, passed out on the floor. Stewart was drinkin' and lookin' at that filthy movie. He just laughed at me when I told him I was takin' Stacy home with me. I tol' him I wanted the film, too."

He paused and drew a deep breath. "He started talkin' dirty then, sayin' dirty things about Stacy. I ... I got mad and threw a punch at him." Lucky grimaced. "I missed. He got that gun out of a desk and started wavin' it at me. I went to take it away from him and ... it went off. Stacy started to stirrin' around, so I wiped my prints off the gun, got the film, and got out of there."

"And I came in a couple of minutes later to find Stacy standing over a dead man with a gun in her hand. Didn't you think about how it would look?"

"Hell, Markham, I wasn't thinkin'! I never meant to kill nobody." He pulled a piece of paper out of his pocket. "But I never meant for Stacy to get in trouble, neither. That's why I wrote it all down, just the way it happened, and signed it. That's why I didn't burn the film. I wanted to be able to prove what I did. If it looks like Stacy's goin' to be convicted, I'll come forward and tell what I did."

There was a bitter taste in the back of my throat. I suppose it was disillusionment. I said, "You'll come forward sooner than that, Lucky."

He was still holding the con-

fession in one hand. With the other, he reached down into the seat beside him. It came up holding a big Colt revolver, the likes of which I hadn't seen in years. It looked just like the gun he used to carry in his films.

"What's to stop me from pluggin' you right now?"

I swallowed the fear that had replaced disillusionment in my throat and answered truthfully, "Because I called the county Sheriff and asked him to meet me here at seven o'clock. It's nearly that now."

Lucky considered for a long moment, then lowered the gun and said, "You know somethin', Markham? I believe you. And I don't think I could shoot you anyway." He stared down at the gun

in his lap. "Well, hell. I guess it's all over."

"Yeah," I said, reaching into the little booth and turning the forgotten projector off, "I guess so."

He looked up at me again with pleading in his eyes. "Could you maybe go away and leave me alone for a minute or two, Markham? I'll give you this paper I wrote up. You already got the film. You can clear Stacy." His expression became wistful. "Back in the old days, a man knew what he had to do. A man knew how to go out when his time came."

It would have been easy, so easy, to go along with him, but I shook my head. It was one of the hardest things I had ever done.

"Only in the movies," I said. •

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS *continued from page 4*

As an eighteen-year-old I was an infantry rifleman in the invasion of Normandy and later European campaigns. Our outfit was the first into Paris on August 25, 1944. I also served in the Korean conflict, again in a rifle company. Since then I've had jobs as television repairman, cab driver, gas pump jockey, machinist, hobby shop owner, real estate salesman and drug peddler (legally, for a pharmaceutical company). More interesting — and helpful — were a couple of years as an investigator for Pinkerton's National Detective Agency in Cleveland when they were still active in that sort of thing and many, many years as a newspaper reporter and sports writer in Northeastern Ohio and Indiana.

Observant readers will note that two of our Mystery Makers confessed to having had jobs as TV repairmen.

continued on page 104

A Fear Of Spiders

by Patrick Scaffetti

He was tied to a wooden chair in the middle of the living room. The hilt of a butcher knife protruded from his chest. His glazed eyes were wide open, staring at the ceiling. A wad of cloth had been stuffed into his mouth. But what made the blood run cold was the sight of a large tarantula on his forehead, its body smashed, one leg continuing to wave up and down weakly!

CROUCHED BESIDE the tiny orange kitten, the tarantula seemed enormous. Its pencil-thick legs extended nearly eight inches in diameter from a hairy, egg-shaped body. The kitten circled the spider warily, pawed at one leg, then arched its back and hissed in fear.

"Even Cleo can't tell it's fake,"

Faye chuckled as she reached over and scooped the kitten from the counter. "Do you think they'll sell, Leo?"

I shrugged. "Who can predict what people will buy? But if they want to scare the daylights out of someone, this should do the trick."

It was eleven-thirty on a Tues-

day night. Faye's novelty shop had officially closed at nine o'clock, but neither one of us had made an effort to leave our seats. Faye's Buddhalike bulk remained settled on her folding chair behind the oldfashioned cash register, and I was contentedly perched on my nearby stool. After all, neither of us had any pressing engagements to keep. Faye's apartment above the shop was just as lonely as my own three rooms in a dilapidated apartment house down the block.

We'd been examining one of the rubber tarantulas Faye had recently added to her inventory of dribbling water glasses, whoopee cushions, and other novelty items. Just looking at the realistic spider made my skin crawl, and Faye's latest feline stray had certainly been fooled. From her position on Faye's ample lap, the kitten continued to peer nervously at the hideous creature as though expecting it to attack at any moment.

The sound of laughter and footsteps from the street pulled our attention from the tarantula. A man and a woman appeared in front of the streaked display window and paused to gaze in at us. The man's arm was wrapped possessively around the woman's shoulders. I recognized both of them immediately. Three weeks before, the man had moved into the apartment across the hall from mine. I didn't know his name yet. Fifteen years before, I'd been

desperately in love with the woman. Her name was Nancy Luxton.

Nancy muttered something to the man, and he shook his head. In a loud, squeaky voice, he said, "Hang on a minute, Nancy. I want to stop in here and say hello."

He steered Nancy toward the door and yanked it open. Reluctantly, she stepped into the shop, closely followed by the man.

"Howdy, folks," he said. "About time we met, seeing as we're neighbors at the apartment house. I'm Hank Matlock."

He lurched toward me, extending a hand. Matlock was obviously quite drunk, and his speech was slurred. He appeared to be in his late forties, and he was one of the most emaciated-looking people I'd ever seen. His gray face was long and gaunt, and his pants bagged around his waist.

As I shook his hand, I felt slightly repulsed by his weak, clammy grip. "I'm Leo Reynolds," I said.

"This here is Nancy," he announced proudly. "She's my girl."

"Hello, Leo," Nancy said in a near whisper.

"You two know each other?" Matlock asked.

Nancy nodded. "We're old friends."

I introduced Matlock and Nancy to Faye.

"Nice to meet you, Faye," Matlock said. Nancy smiled faintly.

I found it difficult to keep from staring at Nancy. Years ago, when our romance had been in full swing, she'd been a petite brunette, not beautiful but sweetly pretty. Now, she was a stocky platinum blonde, and her face was heavily made up. Mascara, rouge, powder, and a blood-red lipstick gave her features the quality of a death mask. Even though it was a warm evening, she had on a long-sleeved purple dress. I noticed it was soiled. It was hard for me to believe that this was the same fresh-looking girl I'd known and loved.

Suddenly, Matlock made a gagging sound, and we all turned to look at him. His eyes were opened wide in unmistakable horror, and his pale lips writhed in silent anguish. His gaze was riveted on the rubber tarantula on the counter. Shuffling backward, he raised his skinny arm to point at the spider. He opened his mouth to speak, but no words came out.

With a flick of her finger, Faye turned the spider onto its back. "It's fake," she said. "It's made out of rubber."

Matlock sighed in relief and muttered, "Get rid of that god-damned thing."

Faye slipped the tarantula back into its cellophane sack and placed it behind the counter.

Matlock drew in several deep,

quivering breaths. "I hate all bugs," he said vehemently. "Especially spiders. I've been around them for the last twenty-five years, and I never want to see another one."

"Twenty-five years!" I exclaimed. "Where have you been?"

Matlock hesitated a moment, then said, "What difference does it make who knows? I won't be around here much longer anyway. I was in prison." He sounded completely sober since the incident with the spider.

No one spoke, and Matlock said, "I suppose you're wondering what I did to spend all that time in the clink. Well, I'll tell you. I was involved in a robbery, and a woman ended up being crippled for life."

"Do you want to tell us the rest of it?" Faye asked in her gravelly voice.

"Sure, why not? I've paid my debt to society," Matlock said defiantly. "Twenty-five years ago, I lived in the same apartment house I'm at now. I had a friend named John Zorro. Neither one of us had steady jobs. I was single, but John had a wife and a ten-year-old son to support. He was forever looking for ways to get a few extra bucks, and he always managed to drag me into his schemes.

"One day, he suggested that we rob an old lady who lived alone in a big house about a mile from here. I

don't know how he found out, but John claimed she had some diamond jewelry and a string of pearls that were worth over eighty grand. She kept them in a jewelry box in her bedroom. Robbing the old gal would be as easy as taking candy from a baby, John promised. Like a fool, I believed him."

Matlock paused to light a cigarette, then continued. "Well, we broke into her house in the middle of the night with no trouble. The jewelry box was right where John said it would be, and the old woman was sound asleep. I was stuffing the jewelry into my pocket when the woman suddenly woke up and started screaming. John fired one shot at her, dropped the gun, then turned and ran like hell. I grabbed the gun and took off after him. I ditched the gun in a trash can and ran toward the river. When I got there, I panicked and threw the jewelry into the water. Then I went back to my apartment.

"The cops picked me up three hours later. They already had John in custody, and he'd spilled the whole thing. Someone had seen me toss the gun into the trash can, and it was covered with my fingerprints. John had had the good sense to wear gloves, and he swore that I'd shot the old lady. He said that the robbery was all my idea in the first place.

"Well, to make a long story short, I shouldered the blame for

the whole thing. The woman lived, but the bullet had torn away over half of her thigh. They had to amputate the leg. Because Zorro had a wife and kid and claimed to be only going along with my plan, he was sentenced to five years in jail. I got twenty-five years."

Matlock laughed bitterly. "Zorro had been the brains behind the whole thing, and he'd shot the old lady. He got off light, but I had to spend over a third of my life in prison. And that place was infested with bugs. They'd crawl over your face while you were sleeping and get into your clothes." Matlock grimaced at the memory. "Thank God, it's over."

"What ever became of John Zorro?" I asked.

"Who knows?" Matlock said. "I haven't heard anything about Zorro since I first went to jail. But I'll bet he shows up around here before long. You see, the cops searched the river when I told them what I'd done with the jewelry, but they didn't find a thing. They never completely believed that I'd actually tossed it into the river. They figured I'd hidden it before I was picked up. Now that I'm out, Zorro's sure to be back to see if the jewelry is still around." Matlock chuckled. "I'm eager to see him again."

"How long have you been out of prison?" Faye asked.

"Three weeks," Matlock replied. "I came straight back

here, rented an apartment, and found me a girl." He slipped his arm around Nancy's waist and squeezed her close. She smiled without emotion and rested her head on his scrawny shoulder.

"I've got a job, too," he said. "I'm an assistant at Garner's Pet Shop."

I was familiar with the shop. I stopped into Garner's every so often to buy cat food for Faye's strays, but I hadn't been there for a few weeks. I recalled the huge tarantula Walt Garner kept in a vivarium in the shop. Walt had named the creature Arachne and refused to sell it. She was his own personal pet.

"With your phobia of spiders, how can you stand working with Arachne around?" I asked.

Matlock drew his upper lip back in disgust. "I stay as far away from that damned thing as I possibly can," he said. "That's the one drawback in working for Garner."

"Come on, Hank, let's get going," Nancy whined. She had appeared ill-at-ease the whole while they'd been in the shop.

"Eager for some action, eh, baby?" Matlock asked with a leer.

Nancy made no reply but tugged him toward the door.

"See you folks around," Matlock said, opening the door. A moment later, he and Nancy disappeared into the night.

"Strange man with a strange story," I said.

"Yes," Faye said, drawing on her inevitable cigarette.

I pulled my pipe from my pocket and slowly began filling it.

"It still hurts to see Nancy, doesn't it?" Faye asked gently.

I nodded.

"Try to take comfort in the fact that she's not the same girl you were in love with, Leo."

I drew on my pipe, and the smoke seemed to ease the ache in my throat.

TWO DAYS LATER, Thursday, I left my apartment in the morning and walked the three blocks to Garner's Pet Shop. The evening before, I'd promised Faye that I'd pick up more cat food for her strays before stopping in for my usual morning cup of coffee and conversation. The air was cool and as fresh as city air can be, and the early spring day promised to be bright and clear.

The door to Garner's shop was open when I arrived. As soon as I stepped inside, I was greeted by the calls of birds, the yelps of pups, and the plaintive cries of kittens, all blended together in a deafening clamor. I spotted Walt Garner standing beside the vivarium that housed his pet tarantula, Arachne. Though only in his early forties, Walt was already stooped and gray haired. Faye and I had decided that he'd aged himself prematurely by worrying over the fate of every animal he sold. The way he

questioned prospective buyers, you would have thought he was in the business of adopting out children instead of selling pets.

"Good morning, Walt," I said over the din.

"Morning, Leo." His hangdog expression seemed even more sorrowful than usual.

"You're looking a little under the weather today, Walt."

"Someone broke into the shop during the night," he said. "The door was unlocked when I got here."

"Is anything missing?" I asked.

Walt gestured toward the vivarium. "I've checked everything over, and the only thing that appears to be gone is Arachne. Who on earth would steal a tarantula?"

"That's a good question," I said, recalling Hank Matlock's fear of spiders. I wondered if perhaps he hadn't slipped into the shop and gotten rid of the tarantula so that he wouldn't have to work near it anymore. "Is your assistant around? Maybe he'd have some ideas."

Garner shook his head. "That's another funny thing. Hank should have been here an hour and a half ago to clean the cages and feed the animals. He's usually very prompt, but he hasn't shown up yet."

A few minutes later, as I paid Walt for the cat food, I asked, "Are you going to call the police?"

"With all the problems the cops around here have got, do you really think they'd bother to investigate a stolen spider?"

"You've got a point there."

"I just hope that whoever took Arachne knows what to feed her and how to care for her."

"Are tarantulas poisonous?"

"No, their bite is seldom worse than the sting of a wasp. Actually, they're very shy creatures."

And ugly as sin, I thought, but I kept my mouth shut.

Walking back toward Faye's shop, I began to feel uneasy about Hank Matlock. I wondered if there was a connection between Arachne's disappearance and the ex-con's tardiness for work. *Probably not,* I thought. More than likely, Matlock had just overslept. But I couldn't shake the nagging doubt. Finally, I decided to stop in and see Matlock before going on to Faye's. If nothing else, it would ease the nebulous worries skittering through my mind.

When I reached the apartment house, I climbed the stairs to the second floor. I saw immediately that the door to Matlock's apartment was slightly ajar. I couldn't recall if it had been that way when I'd left my own place across the hall that morning.

With a strong sense of foreboding, I approached the door and pushed it open. When I saw what was inside, I dropped the bag of cat food and clutched the doorway

for support.

Hank Matlock was sitting in the middle of the living room on a wooden kitchen chair. His arms were bound together behind him, and a heavy rope circled his skinny waist and ankles. Protruding from the center of his pigeon chest was the hilt of a butcher knife. His head lolled back, and his glazed eyes were wide open, staring at the ceiling. A wad of cloth had been stuffed into his mouth.

But what made the blood run cold in my veins was the sight of a large tarantula perched on Matlock's forehead. Its body was smashed, but one leg continued to wave up and down weakly.

"Oh, Jesus Christ," I moaned.

The rest of the room appeared undisturbed, but Matlock had kept some unusual items in his apartment. Several cans of insect killer spray were sitting by the door, and a large flashlight and a crowbar were laying on the couch.

Thankful that I hadn't eaten anything that morning, I wheeled and staggered down the stairs to the telephone in the lobby. With numb fingers, I found the number of the police department in the directory, deposited two dimes, and began to dial.

A couple of policemen in a blue-and-white arrived twenty minutes later. I led them up to the second floor and nodded toward Matlock's door. They entered the room briskly, then emerged a moment later, ashen-faced and obviously

shaken. One of them hurried downstairs to radio in to the station.

When the homicide division showed up, the two policemen drove me to the station. I spent the next few hours there, answering questions. When I was finally free to leave, I walked directly to Faye's shop. She was sitting behind her cash register as I knew she would be.

"Where have you been, Leo?" she demanded. "I thought you were going to be here early with Cleo's food."

The orange kitten on Faye's lap meowed reproachfully.

"Haven't you heard about Matlock?" I asked.

"No," Faye replied, her wrinkled face registering sudden concern.

I accepted the cup of coffee she handed me and began describing my morning. I'm a writer with perhaps the lowest production rate on record, but I've got the literary man's eye for detail and excellent recall.

By the time I wrapped up my story, Faye knew as much about Matlock's death as I did. Her face reflected horror and revulsion, and I noticed that her hand trembled as she lit a cigarette.

"Room 101," she mumbled.

"What are you talking about?"

"That novel you gave me to read last year, Leo. 1984 by George Orwell. In room 101, government officials tortured

dissidents with the things they dreaded most of all. Remember, they used rats to force the main character to deny the woman he loved."

"That's right," I said.

"Well, whoever killed Hank Matlock used his worse fear to torture him. I wonder how long they let that tarantula crawl over him before they finally stabbed him."

I shuddered at the thought. "Someone must have stolen Arachne especially for the purpose of frightening Matlock."

Faye stared at the opposite wall, lost in thought. I knew that her deductions were about to flow. A moment later, she began to speak in a breathless voice.

"When he was here on Tuesday night with Nancy, Matlock said he expected his old partner, John Zorro, to return. Zorro was never convinced that Matlock had actually tossed the jewelry into the river. He came back to find our where Matlock had hidden it, and he used the spider to make him talk."

"That certainly sounds logical," I said. "And totally ruthless."

Just then, the door to the shop opened, and Officer Ted Myers entered. He was a young, friendly cop who took his job very seriously. Now, he looked rather pale.

We exchanged greetings as Myers slapped a quarter onto the counter. He stepped over to the

cooler in the corner and pulled out a bottle of Coke.

"I suppose you've already heard about the Matlock murder," Faye said.

Myers nodded and took a swallow of Coke. "Worse case I've seen in a long time," he muttered. "That horrible spider. And it was your misfortune to find the body, Leo."

"Yes," I said. "I spent most of the morning talking to detectives."

"I know," Myers said. "They're checking on your leads now. They're going to see the girl who was with Matlock on Tuesday night. Nancy Luxton."

"What about his old partner, John Zorro?" Faye asked. "Matlock expected him to show up."

"He won't be showing up anywhere," Myers said. "He died eight years ago."

"Oh," Faye said. "Matlock didn't know that."

"Neither did we. In fact, Zorro was our first guess, too. He'd moved out of state soon after he was released from prison twenty years ago, but it wasn't hard to check on him. He died of a heart attack."

"Then Nancy Luxton has to be your starting point," Faye said, sneaking a glance at me.

"I hope we can learn something from her," Myers said.

"Nancy can't possibly be involved in a thing like this," I blurted out.

"People change," Faye said gently. "You knew her a long time ago, Leo."

"She couldn't have changed that much," I protested.

Myers listened to our exchange with a quizzical expression on his face. Then he finished his Coke in a long gulp and said, "I've got to be going. So long."

"Good-bye, Ted," Faye said.

When the young policeman was gone, Faye lit a fresh cigarette. Neither one of us spoke. Memories began to flow through my mind with a heart-wrenching clarity.

I'd moved into the city fifteen years ago when I was twenty-one in hopes of becoming a writer. My first novel was to be about life in a large metropolitan area, and I even knew what the title would be — *Michelangelo's Drop Cloth*. One afternoon soon after my arrival, I met Nancy Luxton in a diner and struck up a conversation. She was a year younger than me and had come to the city from a small town, aspiring to become an actress. So far, she'd had little success, but she was confident that her big break was just around the corner. Nancy was lovely and kind, and I could see at once that she was far too vulnerable to be alone in the city.

We spent a great deal of time together after that chance meeting in the diner, and we soon became lovers. Neither one of us gave up on our dreams, but Nancy tried much harder than I to realize her

ambition. Finally, she landed a small role in a comedy being performed at a local theater. For the run of the play, Nancy was ecstatic. She believed that she had finally arrived.

A month later, when the play left town, the producer told Nancy that she would no longer be needed. In her grief, Nancy confessed to me what she had had to do with the producer in order to get the part.

That was the beginning of our end. I tried desperately to understand, but I soon came to see that Nancy didn't really care if I ever understood or not. Three weeks later, our affair was irrevocably over. But I knew that a part of me would never stop loving her.

Not long after our final break, I became friends with Faye. She was many years my senior, but she listened sympathetically as I struggled to talk out my feelings about Nancy. When the pain of loss gradually began to subside, our discussions turned to writing. My ambition was still strong, but I had put no actual words on paper. Instead, I became the handyman at my apartment building, and this provided me with enough money to live on and plenty of spare time. My life soon settled into the pattern it still followed.

Nancy's dream was apparently as elusive as my own for as the years passed she, too, remained in the city. Only rarely did we run

into each other, and then our conversations were brief and strained. In fact, I hadn't seen Nancy for several months until she appeared in the novelty shop with Hank Matlock that Tuesday night. I'd heard plenty of rumors but none that I chose to believe.

"Leo, she's no longer the girl you loved," Faye said softly, drawing me back to the present.

I nodded grimly. "I know, but it still hurts."

"It always will."

Again silence.

Finally, Faye asked, "Are you ready to slip into your detective role again, Leo?"

"What have you got in mind?"

"The jewelry that Matlock and Zorro stole is around here somewhere, Leo," Faye said with finality. "Matlock didn't throw it into the river."

"How can you be so sure?"

"If you take a careful look at the facts, Leo, it's the only logical conclusion. One, we only have Matlock's word that he tossed the jewelry into the river. He said there were three hours between the robbery and the time the police picked him up at the apartment house. That gave him plenty of time to hide the jewelry. Two, he came back to the same apartment house after his release from prison. Why would he do that unless there was something in the area he wanted? Three, the flashlight, crowbar, and cans of bug spray that were in his room.

They lead me to believe that the jewelry is hidden behind something in a dark place where there are likely to be a lot of insects."

"But why wouldn't Matlock have gotten the jewelry right after he was released from prison?" I asked. "Why bother to take a menial job at the pet shop when he's got several thousand dollars worth of jewelry to sell?"

"He probably figured the police would keep a close eye on him for a while to see if he suddenly started spending big money. And I'd guess he was quietly looking for a buyer for the jewelry. Why take it out of hiding until he knows what he's going to do with it?"

"Sounds sensible enough," I conceded.

"Whoever killed Matlock suspected that the jewelry was still around. They also knew that Matlock was petrified of spiders, and they used that knowledge to get him to reveal where he'd hidden the jewelry. As you said before, the murderer must have stolen Arachne for the sole purpose of scaring Matlock into talking."

"Do you think it worked?" I asked.

Faye nodded. "After seeing Matlock's reaction to the fake spider, I'd bet he spilled everything. The killer is probably biding his time right now, waiting for a chance to get the jewelry. If only we knew where Matlock stashed it, we might be able to trap the

murderer."

"There's only one place the jewelry could be," I said, feeling the excitement build within me.

"Where?"

"In the basement of the apartment building. There are all kinds of loose cinder blocks along the walls. I store paint and handyman equipment in the basement, but I'm sure I'm the only person who's been down there in years. It's also infested with every type of insect imaginable. It even gives me the creeps."

"There's our answer then," Faye said.

"But the basement is awfully big," I said. "It's divided into four separate rooms, and there must be a hundred different places Matlock could have stashed the jewelry. It would take us days to check behind every loose brick."

"And the killer knows exactly where it is so he can take his sweet time going after it," Faye murmured. "Listen, Leo, Nancy Luxton must be involved in this whole thing. She was hanging around with Matlock for a reason, and she saw his reaction to the rubber tarantula. Could you bring yourself to go and talk to her and try to find out what she knows?"

I hesitated, wondering if I could deal with Nancy now without letting the past interfere. I didn't know if I could or not.

"I'll do my best," I said.

"Do you know where to find her?"

I nodded. "She works at the Pussycat Theater. She wanted to be an actress, and now she's a ticket seller at a pornographic movie house."

"Then go see her, Leo. Find out what she knows without letting on your suspicious. She's a different woman, Leo," Faye said. "You'll be dealing with a stranger."

I LEFT THE SHOP, not at all convinced that Faye was right.

Outside, I headed down the block to my apartment building and descended the rickety stairs to the basement. I knew that I was trying to stall going to see Nancy, but I also wanted to find out if the place had been disturbed. There was no evidence that anyone had been around here for months — the damp rooms appeared as cluttered and filthy as ever. I checked the walls quickly and spotted hundreds of loose cinder blocks. They'd probably been that way for years, and Matlock's jewelry might be hidden behind any of them. But, by the looks of it, whoever killed the ex-con hadn't come for the loot yet.

I spied several insect killer buttons scattered around the floor. Apparently, Matlock had been down here since his return, after all. He must have wanted to kill off some of the bugs before going after the jewelry. But someone had killed him off before he'd

had the chance.

Wearily, I climbed back up the stairs.

IT WAS THREE-FIFTEEN in the afternoon when I reached the Pussycat Theater, and a buck-toothed redhead was in the ticket booth. She smiled invitingly as I stepped up to the window.

"Could you please tell me where to find Nancy Luxton?" I asked.

"She doesn't start work until four," the girl replied. "You can wait for her in the lobby if you want."

"Thanks," I said and glanced at a handwritten card in the window.

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Cute titles, I mused in disgust. Variations on an old, sadly-abused theme.

Wondering if any other creature besides man enjoyed watching its fellows mate, I went over to the entrance and stepped inside. The tiny lobby was stiflingly warm, and I did my best to ignore the unusual odors that filled the place. I smiled at the blonde girl behind a candy and popcorn concession in the corner. Somehow, it didn't seem to fit in with its surroundings.

Abruptly, the door beside the

refreshment stand swung open, and a man in his mid-thirties appeared. He was of medium height, dark complected, and had long, glistening black hair combed in a style reminiscent of Elvis Presley. His shirt was unbuttoned to his navel, revealing a mat of curly chest hair. Mr. Macho all the way.

"The movies are down the hall there," he informed me in a surly voice.

"I'm not here for the movies," I said. "My name is Leo Reynolds. I'm an investigator."

"Oh, yeah," he said in a milder tone. "What are you supposed to be investigating?"

"A man named Hank Matlock was murdered this morning."

Mr. Macho shook his head. "Never heard of him."

"One of the women who works here was a friend of his. Nancy Luxton."

"She's not around right now, but she should be here any minute."

"I'll wait. By the way, who are you?"

"Rick Fox. I'm the projectionist here."

"Who owns the theater?"

"A guy by the name of Mike Armour."

Mike Armour was one of the most notorious pimps in the city. It didn't surprise me in the least that he was involved with pornographic movies.

Someone opened the front door,

and Fox and I both turned to look. Nancy Luxton, dressed in a long-sleeved yellow dress, stepped into the lobby. She blinked in the dimness, then appeared startled at the sight of Fox and me standing side by side.

"What's going on?" she asked.

"This guy is some kind of investigator," said Fox jerking his head in my direction. "Claims you knew a man who was murdered."

"Since when did you become a cop, Leo?" she asked sarcastically.

"I'm not a cop," I explained. "Just an unofficial investigator."

"Which is a fancy way of saying you're nosy," she said.

I shrugged. "Do you have a few minutes to talk, Nancy?"

"Sure, Leo, but I'll tell you right off the bat I don't know anything about Matlock's death. I already told the cops that."

"Do you mind if Nancy and I talk alone?" I asked Fox.

"It's all right, Rick," Nancy said with just a trace of nervousness. "Leo and I are old friends."

Fox nodded and disappeared down a hallway.

"So, Leo, what do you want to talk about?" Nancy looked haggard. There were dark circles under her eyes which the heavy coat of make-up wouldn't conceal. Looking at her, I felt as if a strong hand were squeezing my heart.

I cleared my throat and asked, "How close were you and Matlock?"

"I met him at a bar about a week after he got out of prison. He was an ugly little shrimp, but we had fun together. We went out maybe two or three times. The last time I saw him was the night we stopped into the novelty shop and spoke with you."

"Where did you go when you left Faye's shop?" I dreaded hearing her response.

She looked straight into my eyes and said, "We went back to Hank's place. So what? We were both consenting adults, as they say. There's no law against having a little fun, is there?"

"You don't seem very upset by his death."

"I was sorry to hear about it, Leo, but I'm not about to beat my chest and wail to the heavens. He was just a casual acquaintance."

"Do you know how he died?"

Nancy closed her eyes and nodded weakly. "Horrible," she muttered. "Just horrible." Then, abruptly, she opened her eyes and stared at me defiantly. "That's all I know, Leo. There's nothing more for us to discuss."

I gazed at her without speaking.

"Wipe that superior look off your face, Leo. I know what you're thinking, and I don't like it. I'm getting out of this cesspool pretty soon. Things are finally starting to look up for me."

"I hope so, Nancy. God, I hope so. Thanks for your time." I turned and walked toward the door.

"I really am getting out of this god-damned city," she called after me in a tone of utter desperation. "You'll see."

BACK ON MY OLD familiar stool beside Faye, I recounted my visits to the apartment house and to the Pussycat Theater. I left nothing out, no little detail or passing remark that might later prove important.

Faye listened carefully to my report, occasionally asking a question. When I wrapped it up, she sighed and said, "She's a whore, Leo."

"I know," I said. "I've been hearing rumors to that effect for a long time, but I always talked myself out of believing them. There's no denying the truth any longer."

"I think she's working with someone, Leo. I think someone knew Matlock's past and suspected that he'd hidden the jewelry. He had Nancy seduce Matlock to find out exactly where he'd stashed it. When Nancy saw how Matlock reacted to spiders, she passed it on to her partner. Then he stole the tarantula from the pet shop and used it to get Matlock to talk."

"Nancy was so sensitive, she could never have carried off such a cold-blooded scheme," I protested.

"Leo, you're confusing the past and the present. Nancy has

changed drastically from the girl you used to know. Besides, I think someone has an awfully big wedge with her."

"What do you mean?"

"If Nancy is a hooker, Mike Armour is almost certainly her pimp. In the afternoon, she works as a ticket seller in his theater, and at night, she turns tricks for him. It's fairly common knowledge around here that Armour keeps most of his girls on heroin. It gives him more control over them. Have you noticed that Nancy always wears long-sleeved clothing, no matter how warm it is? I think she's trying to hide her track marks. And if Armour threatened to withhold her fix, she'd do just about anything he asked."

"Christ, Faye, I'd like to believe you're wrong," I said, "but I don't think you are."

"I don't think I'm wrong either, Leo. Maybe if you talked to Armour, you could find out more."

I glanced at my watch. It was almost five o'clock.

"I'll go see Armour tomorrow, Faye. I don't feel much like talking to him now."

"I understand, Leo," she said. "But I'm sure that tomorrow won't be too late. The cops aren't going to over-exert themselves looking for Matlock's killer. The only thing we've got to worry about is when the killer will go after the jewelry in the basement."

I'm betting he won't try for it until tomorrow night at the earliest. By then, things will have settled down a little at the apartment house."

I stepped out the door into the late afternoon sunshine, feeling more depressed than I'd felt in ages.

I AWOKE before the alarm clock went off the next morning and lay in bed listening to the sounds from the street. The dark feeling lingered within me. It was strange. I hadn't thought of Nancy on a conscious level for a long time, but the emotions must have existed dormant within me. How else could I explain my present state of mind?

I wondered if there was anything I might have done years back which could have made the future different for Nancy and me. If there was, I hoped that it would never occur to me. Things were bleak enough without having to regret what might have been.

When the alarm finally shrilled its reveille, I crawled out of bed and silenced it. I glanced at my dust covered typewriter as I got dressed. Perhaps the time would even come when I could write dispassionately about Nancy and myself and shattered dreams.

Feeling old and tired, I left my apartment and walked downstairs to the street. Already it was warm and sunny outside. I made my way along the maze of city blocks, nodding to shopkeepers who were

opening their businesses for the day.

When I reached the Pussycat Theater, I half-wished that Mike Armour wasn't there. I didn't feel ready to question him about Matlock's gruesome murder and perhaps discover more about Nancy's involvement in the wretched affair.

There was a different girl in the ticket booth, a thin, straggly-haired teenager with a bad complexion. She looked up at me indifferently as I approached.

"Is Mike Armour around?" I asked. "I'd like to speak to him."

The girl eyed me with a new interest. "Is he expecting you?" she demanded in a hoarse voice. "Mike doesn't like to be disturbed."

"He's expecting me," I lied.

"Then go on in and knock on the first door to the right."

"Thanks," I said, and walked into the theater. I'd forgotten how bad it smelled inside.

I rapped on the same door that Rick Fox, the projectionist, had come out of the day before.

"Who is it?" a voice called out.

"Leo Reynolds," I said.

"Who the hell is that?"

"I'm an investigator," I said and opened the door.

Mike Armour was sprawled out on a couch in a small room. Clad only in underwear, he was tall, skinny, and hairy.

"What are you investigating?" he asked, not bothering to get up.

"Hank Matlock's murder."

"You're the guy Rick told me about. You're no more of a cop than I am."

"I'm working in an unofficial capacity."

Armour spat out a monosyllabic obscenity and sat up. He reached over, slid a cigarette from a pack, and lit it with a silver lighter. "I don't have to tell you a damned thing, buddy," he said, spouting smoke with every word. "But then I got nothing to tell. I never heard of this Matlock character until Rick told me that someone was here asking about him yesterday."

"Then why was Nancy Luxton playing around with Matlock? She's one of your girls, isn't she? You're her pimp."

"Yeah, Nancy's one of my girls," he said defiantly. "So what? She must have had her own reasons for going with Matlock. He was probably nothing but a trick to her. And the way Nancy's putting on weight, she can't be too choosy about her customers anymore. Why don't you go ask her, instead of hassling me? She'd know more about it than I would. And while you're at it, ask her why she didn't show up for work today. She was supposed to sell tickets starting at nine this morning, and she hasn't shown up yet."

"Does Nancy still have the apartment over on Warren Avenue?" I asked.

"Yeah."

I left the room without saying another word to the pimp. I remembered why Matlock had missed work two days before, and I suddenly felt very afraid for Nancy.

Nancy's apartment house was only a couple of blocks from the Pussycat Theater, and I got there in a matter of minutes. An ambulance was parked in front of the building. As I hurried up the crumbling stone steps toward the entrance two white-coated attendants emerged from the doorway and blocked my path. They were carrying Nancy on a stretcher. Her face was chalk white, and her mouth sagged open. If she weren't already dead, she would be shortly.

I stared after her in helpless horror as the attendants slid the stretcher into the rear of the ambulance. Seconds later, the ambulance sped down the street.

"She's dead," a voice said, and I looked over to see Officer Ted Myers standing beside me.

"How?" I asked.

"Apparently O.D.'d on heroin," he said. "A neighbor lady called us when she didn't answer her door this morning. It was a suicide. She left a note."

"What did it say?"

Ted hesitated, then said, "She confessed to murdering Hank Matlock and said she couldn't bear to live with the guilt."

"Oh, God," I moaned under my

breath. Then I turned and walked away.

Fay was in her shop waiting for me when I arrived.

"Nancy's dead," I said.

"I'm so sorry, Leo," Faye whispered.

I sat down on my stool and cradled my chin in my hands. Neither of us spoke as Faye filled a mug with coffee and handed it to me.

"Do you want to talk about it?" she asked.

I nodded. Slowly, in an expressionless voice, I told her about my conversation with Armour and my visit to Nancy's apartment house.

"Such a waste," Faye said when I finished. Once again, we lapsed into silence.

We sat quietly for several minutes until Faye said, "You realize, don't you, Leo, that Nancy probably didn't kill herself?"

I looked at her in surprise.

"Here's what I think," Faye said. "Armour somehow found out about Matlock's release from prison and the hidden jewelry. He had Nancy put the make on the ex-con so that she could find out where the loot was stashed. She told Armour about Matlock's phobia, and the pimp used the stolen spider as a wedge to get Matlock to talk. Once he knew the hiding place, Armour forced Nancy to write the suicide note and then gave her an overdose of heroin. Now, he thinks that he's

the only one who knows the whereabouts of the jewelry, and he's confident that no one will ever suspect him of murdering Matlock or Nancy."

It took a moment for Faye's words to sink into my addled mind, but when they did, I could not argue with her logic.

"And that bastard will get off scot-free now," I muttered.

"Not necessarily," Faye said. "You're forgetting that you and I have got a pretty good idea of where the jewelry is hidden. My guess is that Armour will go after it tonight or tomorrow. After all, he figures he's off the hook now. Won't he be surprised when he finds us waiting for him?"

The desire to trap Nancy's killer overshadowed my grief. "There's nothing I'd like better than to see that pimp behind bars," I said.

"That makes two of us, Leo," Faye said. "We'll be there in the basement when he arrives. That will provide us with all the evidence we'll need before going to the police. Let's just hope we didn't make a mistake about where Matlock hid the jewelry."

"I don't think we have. Why else would Matlock have put those bug killer buttons down there?"

Suddenly, I was very eager for night to fall.

THE BASEMENT of the apartment house was divided into four

sections: two large rectangular rooms and two small cubicles. You had to pass through both large sections in order to get to the doors leading into the tiny chambers. Each section was dirtier and more cluttered than the next.

Faye and I sat on rickety folding chairs in one of the cubicles. It was pitch dark and quiet as a tomb. I held a flashlight on my lap. I wished that I could turn it on to dispel the gloom, but we'd agreed that darkness was our best protection.

"This place gives me the creeps," Faye whispered.

"You and me both," I said. "I keep hearing rustling noises, and I imagine they're coming from rats."

"You're the handyman around here, Leo. You come down here more than anyone else. Have you ever seen a rat here?"

Was it my imagination again, or was Faye's voice actually quivering? "I've never seen any sign of rats down here," I assured her.

"Thank God," Faye said. She lit a cigarette, and the light from the match illuminated her face. Tension seemed to have etched new lines into her already heavily-wrinkled face.

"I hope he comes tonight," I said. "I'd hate to have to wait down here again tomorrow night."

I glanced at the luminous face of my watch: 1:33.

Without warning, Faye reached

over and gripped my arm. She ground her cigarette beneath her foot.

I listened carefully. There was the unmistakable soft slap of shoes descending the stairs two rooms over. The footsteps moved slowly across the basement and entered the large room next to us. We'd left the door to our cubicle partly open, and, for a moment, I feared the intruder would enter our room. I felt relieved when a beam of light appeared on the lower portion of the wall in the adjacent room.

The man who held the flashlight stooped and inserted a crowbar into a crack between two cinder blocks. He began to jiggle one loose.

Watching him work, I recalled Nancy and Matlock, both murdered so that Armour could have the jewelry. Rage surged through me, and I clenched my fists and leaned forward. At that instant, the chair gave way beneath me and crashed to the ground.

The glare of the flashlight swiveled in my direction as I leapt from the floor.

"Police," I shouted, blinded by the flashlight. "You're under arrest."

A harsh laugh filled the basement. "You're no cop, you snooping fool. You figured you'd beat me to the jewelry, eh?"

My bluff called, I dashed forward, wielding my flashlight like a club. Suddenly, there was a

blinding flash, followed by a sharp pain on my forehead. Then darkness.

When I came to, I was back in the cubicle, lying on the cold, damp floor. Faye knelt beside me, gently slapping my face.

"Are you all right, Leo?" she whispered.

"Wh — What happened?" I stammered, painfully rising to my feet.

"He must have hit you with the crowbar. Then he threw you in here and shut the door. He locked it from the outside. He didn't see me."

I heard the sound of a cinder block being moved in the next room and then the clank of a metal box. Armour obviously had uncovered the jewelry. A second later, his footsteps echoed through the basement as he hurried back toward the steps.

I yanked a heavy ring of keys from my pocket. "As handyman, I've got a key to every lock in this building," I said. "It's only a matter of finding the right one." I fumbled a key into the lock, but it refused to turn.

From near the stairway, there came a cry followed by a crash. A man moaned. Then there was total silence.

"What was that?" Faye asked.

"I don't know," I said, trying another key.

Three minutes and twenty keys later, I successfully opened the door. Faye and I groped our way

toward the stairs. In a corner, I found the string that turned on the light, and I yanked it.

The room was flooded with light. Blinking, I saw a man lying crumpled near the foot of the stairs. A few feet to his left, a metal box lay open with a string of pearls hanging out.

"He must have fallen and hit his head," Faye said.

I bent over and picked up a bug killer button from the floor. "This is what he slipped on," I said. "Matlock protected his loot right up to the end."

The man moaned and moved one leg. I quickly retrieved the crowbar from the next room and said, "Go up to the phone in the lobby and call the police, Faye. I'll stand guard over Armour."

Faye stepped over the prostrate figure and waddled up the stairs.

The man moaned again and feebly rolled onto his back. He stared up at me with a dazed expression on his dark face. In open-mouthed surprise, I stared back at Rick Fox.

LATE THE FOLLOWING afternoon, Faye and I were back on our seats in the novelty shop. My gashed forehead throbbed under a gauze bandage every time I drew on my pipe. Wincing against the pain, I noticed that Faye had removed the rubber tarantulas from the display window.

"What did you do with those spiders?" I asked.

"I sent them back to the distributor," Faye replied, lighting a cigarette. "Having them around gave me the willies."

Cleo, the orange kitten, lay on Faye's mammoth lap and batted playfully at the curls of smoke. She appeared mystified when her tiny paw passed through the gray haze without effect.

The fact that Rick Fox was now in custody did little to relieve my low mood. I still had to contend with the memory of a vulnerable woman's destruction and the knowledge that I might have somehow saved her.

"Cheer up, Leo," Faye said.

"I should have figured out that Fox was the murderer two days ago, before he had the chance to get to Nancy, too."

"But everything seemed to point to Mike Armour," Faye protested. The tone of her voice made it clear that she was troubled by her faulty deductions. "Where did we go wrong?"

Tamping my pipe, I said, "Nancy claimed that things were finally beginning to look up for her. We should have known that Armour wouldn't have promised her a better life to get her to do what he wanted. A pimp would have used threats or held back her drug supply. But suave, macho Fox would have told her they'd leave the city together and maybe even get married once they had the jewelry. We should have realized that right away."

"Good point, Leo," Faye said. "I'd thought along those lines at first, but Armour still seemed a much likelier suspect."

I shook my head in disgust. "There was even a more obvious clue, Faye. But you probably wouldn't have picked it up unless you watched television in the late fifties. There's no excuse for me missing it though. And it explains how Fox knew about the stolen jewelry as soon as Matlock moved back into the area."

"What are you talking about, Leo?" Faye demanded in annoyance.

"There was a TV series about a masked Robin Hood-like character in Mexico called 'Zorro.' In Spanish *zorro* means fox. Rick Fox was John Zorro's son. His father had obviously told him about the jewelry before he died. Rick simply changed his last name to the English translation of his father's name."

"Who would ever have known that unless they spoke Spanish?" Faye muttered.

"Probably every person in the country between the ages of twenty-five and forty who had access to a television set," I replied.

Faye's expression brightened. "You're beginning to sound too much like me, Leo. Go back to being a writer and leave the sleuthing to me."

"One of these days, I just might do that," I said.

Vulcan's Widow

by Edward D. Hoch

When the doorbell rang, Lucy wasn't surprised. She slipped on a robe and went to answer it. A man was standing there. She said quietly, "Have you come to murder me, too?"

LUCY MORROW DIDN'T CRY until after the funeral.

She managed to remain dry-eyed through the minister's eulogy and the graveside prayers. It wasn't until Charles Reyburn came up to her afterwards that the tears welled up, and she didn't care if Charles saw the tears because in a way he was responsible for them.

"I'm terribly sorry, Lucy," he said quietly. "Everyone at the Agency feels awful about this."

"I must say you gave him a nice funeral," she replied with only a trace of bitterness. "They even presented me with the folded

American flag from his coffin."

"Milt was a good man, a good station agent — maybe the best we ever had down there."

"I suppose that's why they killed him," she said quietly. "You have the only career I know where the fittest don't always survive."

Charles Reyburn nodded sadly. Milt Morrow had been an employee of the Central Intelligence Agency, on temporary assignment to the American embassy in Ecuador. While flying a small private jet across the Andes on a special mission, he and two other men had been killed

when a bomb blew the plane apart. They'd brought Milt back for a hero's funeral, because that was the way the CIA did things these days. And Reyburn, who'd recruited Milt in the first place, had the job of comforting his widow.

"Is there someplace we can talk?" he asked her.

"You can ride back with me if you wish."

"Very well."

He motioned for his driver to go on without him and accompanied her to the big black limousine the funeral home had provided.

In the back seat, shut off from the driver, Charles Reyburn asked, "Have you thought about what you're going to do now?"

"Without Milt, you mean? I was without him a good deal of the time in recent years, thanks to you. The tears were for him, not for me."

"I'm authorized to offer you a job with the Agency if you'd like one. Secretarial duties at Langley — no overseas assignments."

Lucy turned to face him. "I'm a 44-year-old woman, Charles, with a married daughter in California. By next year I could be a grandmother."

"You hardly look like a grandmother."

"Thank you, but I hardly look like a CIA secretary, either. This isn't a TV show where I can take Milt's place and run down his killers. He's gone and it's over and

finding out who killed him isn't going to change any of that."

Charles Reyburn shifted on the seat, brushing long gray hair back from his forehead. He was a handsome man in his fifties, a career man, and Lucy didn't blame him for anything that had happened. "If it's any consolation to you, Lucy, we have a pretty good idea of the group that planted the bomb on Milt's aircraft. You see, his code name down there was Vulcan, and we intercepted a coded message about Vulcan on the very day it happened. There wasn't time to warn him. But we'll take care of those who did it."

"Vulcan," Lucy mused. "And I am Vulcan's widow."

"If you don't accept my offer, what will you do?"

She smiled slightly. "Next week I'm going back to my college — back to Harvester. They might have an opening for me."

"Teaching?"

"No, fund-raising. How's that for a change in life-styles?"

IN THE TWENTY-TWO YEARS since she'd graduated from Harvester College, Lucy Morrow had returned to the campus only twice — first for the tenth reunion, and then last year to attend her daughter's graduation. The campus had changed in the years since her youth. For one thing, the separate women's campus across town had long ago been abandoned. Male and female students

mingled freely, in classroom and dorm, and the old athletic field had sprouted modern high-rise living quarters to handle the increased enrollment of the late 60s.

"What do you think of the place?" Dean Bayless asked as he strolled with her across the main quadrangle.

"It's changed a great deal since my day. I noticed that when I was back for Linda's graduation."

"You didn't get up to see her when she was an undergraduate?"

"Girls today don't want their mothers showing up. Milt came up with her to look the place over before she decided on it, but I stayed away."

"Linda's married now?"

Lucy nodded. "These days I guess it's better than living in sin. He's studying for his Master's at U.C.L.A. And she has a teaching job in the local school system."

"Typical."

"Yes, isn't it? But then all your Harvester grads can't marry CIA agents."

"I was sorry to hear about Milt..."

"Until you phoned I didn't even realize you knew him."

"I did some government work before accepting the post here."

"You worked with Milt?"

"Not exactly. But we knew each other. Since we had this opening I thought I owed it to him to offer it to you."

Suddenly a great many things became clear to Lucy. "You thought — or Charles Reyburn thought?"

"I—"

"He knew I wouldn't take the secretary's job so he had a backup all ready, didn't he? Now I know the name of the game. It's called pensioning off Vulcan's widow!"

"That's beside the point. In truth you'd be perfect for the job I have in mind."

"Which is?"

"I told you it involved fund-raising for the college. You'd be traveling around to various parts of the country calling on some of our more successful alumni. Until now it's a job that men have handled, but I think there are certain advantages to having a bright, intelligent woman like your self take over."

"I go around for donations? That sort of thing?"

"More often you'll be advising a specific alumnus or alumna on his or her estate, on how to best leave a bequest to the college after death. Estate analysis is important work these days. In many cases you'll be able to save them some tax dollars and get a nice bequest for Harvester besides."

"And why do you think a woman might have an advantage in this sort of thing? I'm a bit beyond hopping into bed with old men, you know."

"My God, Lucy! I don't mean anything like that! In truth we've

had a few problems in the past. When a wealthy man is thinking about estate planning and someone from Harvester — or any other college — shows up with some fast talk about a bequest, the man's relatives sometimes resent it. They see the money as being taken away from them, when in truth it could work to their advantage in most tax situations. But they resent it. And we've even had cases where they resorted to violence."

"Oh fine!"

"But they certainly wouldn't try beating up a woman."

"Don't be too sure of it."

"Give it a try, Lucy. I can send you out with our best man, Sam Calendar. He'll show you the ropes better than anyone could."

Under any other circumstances she would have said no. But Milt was only in his grave a week and she hadn't gotten used to the idea yet. She needed something, and right now Dean Bayless' offer was the only one worth considering.

AFTER HER ENCOUNTERS with the benevolent efforts of Reyburn and Dean Bayless, Lucy Morrow expected that Sam Calendar would treat her in much the same manner. She was a bit surprised to find him a much younger man, barely into his thirties, and one who quite obviously resented her presence on the job.

"This is a little out of my line,"

he said, avoiding her eyes. "I don't usually spend my time breaking in trainees."

"I'm not exactly a trainee. And frankly, Mr. Calendar, I don't even know if I'll like the job. But I promised Dean Bayless I'd give it a try, so I guess you're stuck with me."

"Yes, it seems that way."

"Where are we going?"

"To visit two brothers who own a successful shopping center complex in Alexandria, Virginia."

Alexandria was a suburb of Washington, just south of Arlington, and Lucy knew it well. Though she and Milt had always lived north of the city in Maryland, they'd often visited friends in the Virginia suburbs. It was only a few hours' drive from the Harvester campus, and Lucy was vaguely pleased that her first fund-raising assignment was to be on relatively familiar ground.

During the drive down Sam Calendar relaxed a bit, trying to make friendly conversation. "It was too bad about your husband. Do you have any children?"

"A married daughter in California," Lucy said.

"That's a long ways away."

"I guess so. She couldn't even manage to fly east for her father's funeral."

Unwanted, a trace of bitterness was back in her voice. Bitterness against the Agency and against her daughter and even against Milt for the act of dying.

After that the conversation switched to small talk. She learned that Sam Calendar was married, with two children, that he lived in a new subdivision near the campus, and that he'd graduated from Harvester ten years earlier. As they chatted, she began to relax for the first time in days.

They reached the Midstate Shopping Center in the early afternoon, in plenty of time for their two o'clock appointment.

"The Torry brothers have their offices in that building at the end of the parking lot." Sam said, heading for it.

"You mean where the police cars are?" She could see two squad cars with flashing lights pulled up in front at those odd angles they always assumed in emergencies.

"Damn! wonder what's going on?"

He parked across from the building and they walked over. There were a few others attracted out of curiosity, but most of the shopping center's patrons drove on by, headed for the discount stores and supermarket that formed the core of the sprawling center.

A uniformed officer blocked the way as they tried to enter. "Sorry, the offices are closed."

"I had a two o'clock appointment with the Torry brothers," Sam Calendar said. "What's the trouble here?"

"A bomb went off."

"A bomb!" Sam glanced at Lucy with raised eyebrows. "Were there any injuries?"

The officer hesitated and a plainclothes detective stepped out of the office. "Can I help you? I'm Sergeant Doyle."

"We had a two o'clock appointment," Sam explained, extending his business card. "This is Mrs. Morrow. She's working with me."

The detective grunted. "Bomb went off here about two hours ago, just before lunch. A letter-bomb, came in the morning mail. Mr. Torry was killed instantly."

"My God!" Sam gasped. "Just like that!"

Sergeant Doyle held open the door for them. "You can come in if you want."

"Could we see his brother Keith? Or has he gone?"

"No, he's still here."

Somehow Lucy expected the shattered body to be still in evidence, a jarring reminder of the bomb that had killed Milt somewhere over the Andes. But the body was gone and the door to Justin Torry's private office was discreetly closed. Walking across the thick orange carpeting to his brother's office, Lucy saw nothing to indicate it was anything but a normal working day.

But the secretaries' desks were unoccupied. The girls would have been hysterical, of course. They would have been sent home for the day.

Sergeant Doyle showed them

into Keith Torry's office and Lucy had her first surprise. The girls hadn't all gone home. One of them, a slim blonde in her mid-twenties, was seated opposite Torry's desk. But it was Torry himself that riveted her attention. He was a white-haired man close to sixty, obviously the younger of the brothers, and with a tanned face and trim body that spoke of hours on the tennis court or jogging paths.

"Mr. Calendar?" he asked, rising to shake hands. "My brother was expecting you."

"A terrible thing! We just heard!" He introduced Lucy, and the white-haired man's narrow eyes lingered over her body for a moment before shifting away in obvious dismissal.

"You may leave us, Miss Winston," he told the young woman. "Go home and try to get some rest."

"I'll try." As she passed Lucy she seemed to feel some explanation was necessary. "I was Justin's secretary," she said. "I took him the mail. I — I had the bomb in my hands!"

"Didn't you open his mail?" Lucy asked, familiar with office routine.

"The business mail. But this was marked personal. It was a bit thick. I thought someone was sending him a pamphlet. He opened it as I left the room and — and there was this terrible explosion! I was knocked on the floor."

"We've already talked with Miss Winston," the detective said, obviously annoyed at Lucy's question. "Now we want to talk with you. What was the nature of your business with Justin Torry?"

"It was with both brothers, really," Sam Calendar explained. "Mrs. Morrow and I are in the college's estate analysis office. We'd hoped to interest Mr. Torry — and his brother here — in making a bequest to Harvester."

The detective raised his eyebrows. "Excuse me — I never went to college. But is that common practice?"

"A number of colleges and universities solicit bequests these days. It's the only way to survive."

From behind his desk Keith Torry stirred. "I'm afraid I'll have to cancel our appointment, Calendar, under the circumstances."

"I understand, of course. Do you have any idea who could have done this terrible thing?"

"Men in business sometimes make enemies without realizing it," Torry answered. "It was probably somebody my brother never laid eyes on."

Sergeant Doyle turned back to Sam and Lucy. "Did you two ever meet the dead man?"

"I did, once," Sam answered. "He was up at the college and stopped in to see me. Of course we're always interested in bequests, so I followed up his visit

with some correspondence and set up this meeting."

Keith Torry snorted. "I was opposed to it from the beginning, I don't mind saying. Justin could do what he wanted with his share of the business, but I have no intention of leaving my money to Harvester College. I was glad to get out of the place. It was four years of wasted time as far as I was concerned."

"Sorry you feel that way," Lucy said. "I suppose we should be going."

"Yes," Sam Calendar agreed. "You have my card, Sergeant, if you need to contact us further."

As they left the office Lucy could hear the detective renewing his questioning of Keith Torry.

"WELL!" SHE EXCLAIMED when they were outside. "That's my first experience with a murderer!"

The words were barely out of her mouth when she realized that Milt had been murdered, of course. But that was in another country, and besides ...

"Mine too," Sam agreed. "I guess Harvester won't be getting any bequests from the Torry brothers."

"What did you think of that secretary? I wouldn't be surprised if she's having a bit of an affair with Keith Torry."

"Why do you say that? Just because she was sitting in his office? It seemed natural enough

to me, under the circumstances."

"Well," Lucy said, sorting it out in her mind. "Miss Winston called the dead man, her employer, by his first name. Now that in itself wouldn't be too strange, since with two brothers in the same office a simple 'Mr. Torry' might be confusing. Surely they had given permission to be called by their first names to avoid confusion."

"I'll buy that," Sam Calendar agreed.

"But while she was using her employer's given name, Keith Torry called her simply Miss Winston. Now I've worked in offices and so have you. Did you ever hear of an office where the secretaries called their bosses by first names but were themselves referred to as 'Miss'? In most cases it's just the opposite!"

"Maybe he doesn't like her?"

"Then she wouldn't have gone into his office to be comforted in the first place! Don't you see, Sam — Keith Torry used her surname strictly for our benefit, and maybe for that detective's benefit too. But why keep it a secret if they're on a first-name basis? Well, maybe because they're keeping their whole relationship a secret. Maybe because they're having an affair."

"My God, Lucy! You should have been a detective. I can't say if you're right or not, but I've got to admit it's a possibility."

They reached the car and got in.

She was feeling very sure of herself for some reason. "We shouldn't waste this whole trip down here," she decided. "Why not call on the dead man's widow to offer our sympathies? Even if she doesn't want to see us, we'll have done the right thing by making the effort. And maybe someday she'll remember her husband's alma mater in her will."

Sam Calendar hesitated and then said, "Why not? I think it's a good idea."

They found the address in the phone book, and when they turned into the street it was easy to spot the house. Four cars were pulled up in front, half blocking the wide circular driveway. One was a police car and another had the call letters and channel number of a local television station painted on its side.

Another police officer met them at the door. "Sorry," he said. "Only the immediate family's allowed inside."

"We're business associates of Justin Torry," Lucy said. "We wanted to express our sympathy to Mrs. Torry." She handed over one of Sam's calling cards.

"Wait here a minute," the officer said. It was obvious to Lucy that the local police were being properly respectful to the dead man's family. It was the sort of respect that went with the house and Justin's position in the community. After a moment the policeman returned and said,

"She can see you for just a minute."

They were ushered into a large brightly-colored living room decorated in the surprisingly modern taste. A stout woman in her fifties was sobbing quietly in an armchair, while another much younger woman hovered nearby. Surprisingly, it was the younger woman whom Sam approached. "Mrs. Torry, I can't tell you how sorry we are. It's a terrible, senseless crime."

"Thank you for coming," she said quietly. "You're Mr ...?"

"Calendar. From Harvester College. This is Lucy."

The woman extended her hand to Lucy. "I'm Ida Torry, and this is Justin's sister, Ruth Jolson." She indicated the tearful woman in the chair, who barely nodded. But Lucy's attention was on the widow. She guessed Ida Torry to be no more than thirty, with the slim figure and high cheekbones of a fashion model. It seemed likely she was a second wife. Or possibly a third.

"I lost my own husband just a few weeks ago," Lucy said. "I know it's little consolation, but I can appreciate what you're going through."

"Thank you," Ida Torry said. "I think it's especially difficult because we were married such a short time — only two years." She glanced down at her sister-in-law. "And I'm from a different generation that shows our emotions in

different ways."

"I only met your husband once," Sam Calendar said, "but I admired the man. He was a credit to Harvester College. I'm sorry he's dead."

"I hope his memory will live after him, though I'm afraid his brother might have something to say about that."

"We just met Keith," Lucy said, anxious to keep the conversation going. "He was still at the office with the police."

"I hope they question him well!" Ida Torry said, turning away.

But the dead man's sister had caught the implication of her remark. She came out of the chair with eyes blazing. "Listen, you little *hussy* — you might have *slept* with my brother, but you were never a real wife to him! How *dare* you insinuate that Keith had anything to do with his death?"

Ida Torry retreated a step before the older woman's fury. "I didn't mean —"

"I know what you *meant!* And maybe the police should ask *you* about Justin's death!"

At that moment Sergeant Doyle strode through the doorway. He took in the scene at once, but as Ruth Jolson's attack subsided he turned instead to confront Sam and Lucy. "Just what are you two doing here?"

"We came to offer our sympathy," Lucy explained.

"All right, you've done that.

Now you'd better go." As they started to leave he added, "I'd suggest the side door. There's a TV newsman out front."

"Thank you." Sam said, and they departed.

BACK IN THE CAR, Lucy gave a long sigh. "That's some family!"

"Sure is! But I think we'd better be heading back north before that cop Doyle gets irritated."

Lucy was silent, as if she hadn't heard him. Finally she asked, "Sam, do you really think one of those people we met killed him?"

"Of course not! Those aren't the sort to send letter bombs. It's probably some screwed-up kid who got caught shoplifting at Torry's shopping plaza."

"But if they wanted to make a letter bomb, they could find out how to do it easily enough, couldn't they? There are books around that tell you all those things."

"I suppose so. There are books around that tell you how to do everything from making love to growing pot. You should see some of the things they read in the dorms!"

"They knew he was thinking of changing his will in favor of Harvester. It's a classic motive for murder."

But Sam Calendar only sighed. "In books maybe, Lucy, but not in real life. Take Keith, for instance. Chances are he's worth a million dollars already. Would he murder

his brother for a second million? It's pretty doubtful."

"Remember the secretary," Lucy said.

"Miss Winston? So what if he is having an affair with her?"

"Justin could have found out and threatened to throw him out of the business. Older brothers have a way of doing things like that."

But Sam merely shook his head. "I don't buy it."

"Let's go see the family lawyer," she decided.

"What?"

"Don't act so horrified. If Justin stopped at the college to talk with you about his will, I'll bet he gave you his lawyer's name. It's probably right there in your file."

"Well, sure it is. But we can't just barge in there! That Sergeant Doyle is already giving us odd looks."

"The lawyer's office is one place Doyle won't be — not yet, anyway. Come on!"

Grumbling all the way, Sam Calendar drove them into Alexandria. The day had turned warm and the afternoon streets were crowded, the way streets often are on the first really good day of spring. Sam parked the car in a ramp garage adjoining a new five-story office building, and they took an elevator to the office of Freeder & Witcomb. When they'd introduced themselves to the balding Mr. Witcomb, Lucy did the talking.

"You understand we don't want

to appear to be prying into Justin Torry's affairs," she said, "but we're wondering if there was any recent change in his will concerning Harvester College."

Witcomb stared at them with thoughtful eyes, as if weighing his reply. "Justin was a good and close friend, and his death like this is a terrible shock to me. Naturally you must realize that I cannot discuss the contents of any client's will. However I can tell you that the latest will was drawn two years ago, at the time of his marriage. There have been no changes in it since that time."

"Then we can assume Harvester isn't mentioned. But had he approached you about changing his will?"

"I knew he'd had a conversation with Mr. Calendar here, and I knew a meeting was scheduled for today. But nothing more specific was advanced."

Lucy pressed further. "Would I be right in assuming that Mrs. Torry did not like the idea of her husband's meeting with us?"

"I couldn't say," the lawyer told them. "Now if you'll excuse me —"

"Certainly. Thank you for your time."

As they started for the door, Witcomb suddenly said, "You'd do well to stay away from Ida Torry. She doesn't need the likes of you in her hour of grief."

Lucy whirled and confronted him, not certain she'd heard

correctly. "What are you saying?"

The lawyer dropped his head. "Excuse me. I shouldn't have said that." He quickly picked up the telephone, perhaps to keep from saying more.

Outside, Lucy was furious. "Does he think we're sort of jackals, sniffing around the dead man for money?"

"Well, our visit only hours after the killing probably did strike him as a bit odd."

"My God, money for Harvester is the furthest thing from my mind right now! I want to find out who killed that man!" It was the first time she'd admitted it out loud.

"You can't be a detective, Lucy. It's up to the police to find the nut who sent that bomb."

"But don't you see, Sam, that's exactly what we're supposed to think! That it was a nut, a terrorist of some sort. People don't kill their husbands or business partners with letter-bombs!"

"You're right, they don't."

"But maybe this time they did."

"I think we'd better be heading back. There's nothing more we can do here."

"How about Justin's secretary, the interesting Miss Winton? We could question her."

"Lucy, Lucy — you're *not* a detective! There's nothing for us to *solve!* The police will investigate and they'll probably arrest the sister."

"Ruth Jolson! — I didn't even think of her!"

"Well, don't! We're going back home!"

And so they went.

ON THE DRIVE BACK NORTH, Lucy asked, "Was Torry's wife with him that day at the college?"

"No. This was the first I'd met her."

"But when he talked to you did he imply he was cutting her out of the will to leave the money to Harvester?"

"Not all of it, certainly. I gathered there was a joint holding with his brother in the shopping plaza and that couldn't be touched." Sam turned off the expressway at the Harvester exit. "I set up a date to see him about six months ago, but he had a business meeting that took him out of town at the last minute. After that things just sort of drifted till I was able to arrange today's meeting."

"Just a bit too late, at least from Harvester's viewpoint."

"Seems so."

"Sam, let me study your file tonight."

"What for?"

"I just want to know everything I can about this case."

"It's not a case, Lucy — at least, not our case. I have to keep reminding you."

"Anyway, let me have the file."

"Help yourself. It's in my briefcase."

"Maybe next time you take me out on a call it'll be easier."

"Our alumni don't get themselves murdered every day," Sam Calendar said with a smile.

PROPPED UP IN BED reading over the thin file of correspondence between Sam and the dead man, Lucy remembered all the times that Milt had teased her about her curiosity concerning his job. Despite what she'd told Charles Reyburn, she was cut out for this sort of work. The puzzling over a crime, the paperwork and the leg work, all held a strange fascination for her. She thrived on them.

The first thing in Sam's file was a memo to himself outlining his meeting with Justin Torry on September 28th of last year. Then there was an exchange of letters in which Torry suggested Sam visit him at home on the evening of October 16th. In the next letter, dated October 18th, Torry apologized for having been called away on business and suggested they reschedule the meeting for sometime in November. There was other correspondence after that, and a pocket calendar with several dates toward the end of the year circled in ink. A phone number had been written in the margin of the calendar.

She puzzled over the phone number and finally decided to call it. A toll call, to a motel in Alex-

andria. Sam had probably stayed there, she decided.

Except that the meeting had never taken place. According to his notes he hadn't gone back to Alexandria until this trip with Lucy. And the correspondence from Torry bore out Sam's notes. The holidays had intervened, and with one thing and another the two men had never met.

She put the folder on the table with a sigh and turned out the light.

But she couldn't sleep.

Her mind kept returning to the Torry office, to the strangely muted aftermath of the bombing.

Muted. And yet there'd been something said which stuck in her mind, like a nagging headache that wouldn't quite leave.

The detective, Sergeant Doyle, had said something ...

She rolled over in the bed. Then she remembered.

She reached for the phone again and called Sam Calendar.

"Hey," he grumbled, "do you know it's almost midnight?"

"Sam, why did you wait six months to see Torry?"

"Why? I don't know. He postponed it a couple of times and I didn't want to look too eager."

"But you *were* eager!" she said into the telephone. "You were eager last fall when you set up the first date!"

"Look, I'll talk to you in the morning, Huh?"

"All right." She hung up and

sat there in bed, thinking of Milt and wondering what he would have done.

After about twenty minutes the doorbell rang. She wasn't surprised. She slipped on a robe and went to answer it. Sam Calendar stood there.

"Hello, Sam," she said quietly. "Have you come to murder me too?"

HE ENTERED THE APARTMENT and sat down, his face ashen. But she didn't think he was carrying a weapon. He would have to do it with his bare hands, and she hoped he wasn't the sort for that.

"How did you know?" he asked. "You couldn't know!"

"I know. You killed Justin Torry because you've been having an affair with his wife. I suppose the money entered into it too, in a way. With Torry dead you could divorce your own wife and marry Ida and all that money."

She patted the file beside her. "You were to meet Torry at his home on October 16th. He was called away, but you weren't notified, or you would have noted it on a memo to yourself. You went to the house and met Mrs. Torry, which explains how you knew her this evening when we met her with Torry's sister. The sister was the right age, and sobbing, but you knew Ida Torry was the younger one. You knew, because you met her at the Torry home on

October 16th, and it was lust at first sight."

Sam Calendar snorted. "She wanted me to come, for an adventure. She was supposed to phone and cancel the appointment, but she conveniently forgot."

"So you've been seeing her these six months, sneaking down to that motel in Alexandria, circling the dates on your little calendar. Your family thought they were regular business trips. But one person learned the truth — that lawyer, Witcomb. That was the meaning of his strange remark today — *Stay away from Ida Torry. She doesn't need the likes of you.* I was furious about it, but it makes sense when I realize it was aimed at *you* because of the secret relationship."

Sam Calendar nodded, staring at the floor. "I suppose Torry might have known too. We were careful, but too many people knew her. Witcomb himself must have seen us together." He paused and then went on. "But all that doesn't prove I sent the bomb."

She stood up and started pacing the floor. "Sam, how I wish this could be different! Before today I hardly knew you, and here I am accusing you of murder! I suppose you did learn about letter bombs from some of those underground papers and books the kids have in their dorms. You learned, and decided to try it out. You picked today for two reasons. Torry would

be in his office when the letter bomb arrived because he had an appointment to meet us. And you probably figured our arrival so soon afterward would direct suspicion away from us."

"How did you know?" he asked again.

"It was something Sergeant Doyle said, or didn't say. He only said that Mr. Torry had been killed, but a moment later you indicated you knew Justin was dead. How did you know it wasn't his brother? How, Sam, unless you sent the bomb?"

"That's no proof."

"Not for a jury, maybe. But I think this calendar with the circled dates is. The clerks at the motel will remember you and Mrs. Torry. With the motive establish-

ed, the rest shouldn't be difficult."

He stood staring at her. "It seems you're leaving me with only two choices — either turn myself in to the police or kill you."

"That's right," she said, watching his hands. "But killing me would be pointless. Witcomb knows about you and Ida."

"Yes," he agreed.

She picked up the telephone. "I'm going to phone Sergeant Doyle down in Alexandria. I hope you'll let me."

She saw his hand start to move and then fall back to his side. She asked the operator for the number of the Alexandria police department and began to dial.

Milt would have been proud of her. •

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS *continued from page 70*

Perhaps one of you college students would like to do a thesis on this. Perhaps not. Stranger things have happened. A couple of years ago, a Japanese Research outfit wanted to know my blood type because they suspected there was a correlation between that and the writing of science fiction. One thing is certain: PATRICK SCAFFETTI was *never* a TV repairman — or if he was, he's keeping quiet about it. He did, however, confess to the following:

For the past nine years I've taught a variety of subjects at both the junior and senior high school levels. I hold a bachelor's degree in English Literature and a master's degree in English Education. I'm a member of the Mystery Writers of America, an omnivorous reader, and a lover of old movies and antique books. I especially admire the talents of two very divergent authors, Charles Dickens and John D.

continued on page 124

Voices In The Wind

by Gary Brandner

When you're old you hear voices. Sometimes the voices are real, threatening to get you, warning you that you might be killed some lonely night. Sometimes the voices aren't there at all.

GETTING OLD is hearing voices in the wind.

So thought the old man as he lay upstairs in the big lonely bed. A fresh wind blew from the north, bringing the first chill of autumn. And there were voices in the wind.

The old man's daughter: "I don't see why you want to stay on alone in the old house now that Mother's gone. We have a spare room you're welcome to use, and there's a park close by where you can go and sit and get some sun for a change. You're too pale."

And his son: "Dad, be sensible, this place has been burglarized, what is it, three times now. Now that they know you're alone in the house they'll keep coming back, and one night they'll kill you."

The greasy-haired kid down the block: "Hey, old man, are you saying I broke into your house? What would I want with the crummy junk you got in there? You're crazy. Old and crazy. You better go home and go to bed. An old dude like you could fall down and get hurt out on the

street."

The policeman personally, I'm on your side, but officially there is a thing I can do. To make a burglary charge stick you just about have to catch the kid in the act. Even then, the laws being what they are, there's a good chance he'd be turned loose. If I were you, I'd invest in some good locks."

The locksmith: "There you are, I'll guarantee you it'll take a real professional now to get through these locks. Nobody's going to budge those window bars either. They're tempered steel."

The old man rolled over in the bed. Out of long habit his hand reached down to the rug beside him, but no furry head lifted to accept his touch. Bozo had been old, like the man, and they shared each other's infirmities. The wind whispered something at the window. A tear rolled down the old man's cheek and soaked into the pillow. Stealing his possessions was one thing, but there was no excuse for what they did to his dog. Bozo didn't have the teeth to bite anybody. He hadn't even barked loud in years. No excuse. The old man lay on his back listening to the wind voices.

Scrape.

What was that? A new sound. Foreign. A gritty, sliding sound, not like the wind. The old man held his breath.

Scrape.

Again. Coming from where? Downstairs?

Scrape.

Multiple locks on front and back doors, tempered steel bars on the windows. Nobody could get in.

But there was something down there.

The old man turned back the covers and stepped out of bed. The wind muttered at him through the crack he left open at the bottom of the window. He pulled on his slippers and went to the closet for his warm woolen bathrobe. He pulled the robe on over his thin shoulders and knotted the belt. He took a sturdy cane down from a hook at the back of the closet. The old man used the cane only when his arthritis acted up, but he thought it might make a good weapon.

Carefully he walked down the stairs, one tread at a time, alert to the night sounds. They were familiar, like old friends. The joints of the old house creaking the way his own did when the weather turned cold. The muted ticking of the mantel clock, one thing the thief had not taken yet. The drip of the bathroom faucet that he would get around to fixing one of these days. And the wind.

Scrape.

The sound that did not belong.

With the cane gripped in one hand the old man moved softly from room to room, switching on the lights. The door locks were undisturbed, the window bars in

place. No intruder lurked in any of the corners. He completed his circuit in the living room. Everything was there as he left it when he went up to bed. His favorite chair still faced the cold fireplace, the Sunday paper on the floor beside it in comfortable disarray.

"Is anyone here?" His voice was curiously flat in the empty nighttime house. There was no answer.

It was the wind then, after all. The old man shuffled back through the rooms, turning off the lights. He returned to the living room for one last look before going upstairs.

Scrape.

It was here. Somewhere in this room.

"Help me."

The old man stood in the center of the room, head cocked, gripping his cane.

"Help me. I'm caught."

Slowly he crossed the room and stood before the big brick fireplace. He squatted down for a closer look. A powdering of black soot sifted down onto the grate.

"Come on, I know you're down there. Help me get out. Call the fire department or somebody."

The old man backed off and eased himself into his favorite chair. Outside, the wind picked up. He shivered.

"Listen, I'm sorry about the things I took. I'll pay you for them. Go ahead and call the police if you want to. I'll tell them everything."

The old man did not move from his chair.

"About your dog, see, it was an accident. I didn't mean to hurt him."

The old man began balling up the Sunday paper, a page at a time. He tossed the crumpled balls into the fireplace.

"What are you doing?"

He got up then and from the kindling box next to the fireplace he took a handful of dry pine strips. He laid them crisscross over the crumpled paper.

"Get some help, will you? I'm jammed in here and can hardly breathe."

On top of the kindling the old man laid some nice fat logs, oozing with dried pitch.

"Why don't you answer me?"

The old man struck a wooden match on the bricks and touched the flame to the newspaper.

"What are you doing? Are you crazy?"

The drips of dry pine caught quickly and the fire licked up and around the logs. The pockets of pitch snapped merrily and the flames leaped up the sooty bricks at the back of the fireplace.

A sound like someone coughing.

A scream..

The old man selected a record of Strauss waltzes and put it on the player. He turned the volume well up. When you are old, your hearing is not so good. Why, sometimes you imagine voices in the wind.

Stiff Intruders

by Richard Laymon

Dead bodies kept appearing in Charlie's lawn chair. After awhile, it got to be annoying!

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING here?" Charlie demanded of the dead woman.

She didn't answer. She was leaning back in Charlie's lawn chair, the very chair he wanted for himself, the chair he sat in every morning to drink his first two mugs of coffee. This was his favorite part of the day: so quiet, the air still cool and fresh from

the night, the sun gently warming. But now, this!

"Hey!" he shouted.

She didn't stir. She simply sat there, hands folded on her lap, ankles crossed casually. Charlie sipped his coffee, and walked around her. She wore a sleek, blue evening gown. Inappropriate wear, Charlie thought. A sun dress or swimsuit would be just

the thing, but a formal, off-the-shoulder gown was unsuitable, even pretentious. Not that she could be held accountable.

Charlie went into the kitchen for a refill of coffee. As he pushed through the door to the backyard and saw her sitting there, the injustice overwhelmed him. He decided to nudge her off the chair, and let her fend for herself.

That's exactly what he did. The woman flopped and sprawled, and Charlie took his seat.

After a few moments, he moaned in despair. He simply couldn't enjoy his coffee in front of her.

Emptying his cup on the grass, he got to his feet and rushed into the house. He wanted to pound roughly on Lou's bedroom door. That might rub Lou the wrong way, however, so he rapped lightly.

"Knock off the racket!" Lou yelled.

"May I come in?"

"Suit yourself."

Charlie opened the door and stepped into a room stinking of stale cigar smoke. Lou was in bed, covers pulled high so that only his face showed. The chubby face, flat nose and bulging eyes always reminded Charlie of a pug named Snappy he'd once owned. Snappy, who nipped anything in sight, generally had a sweeter disposition than Lou. Especially in the morning.

"Get up, Lou. I want to show you something."

"What?"

"Get up, get up!"

Lou moaned and sat up. "This better be good," he said.

"Oh, it's not good, but you'd better see it."

Muttering, Lou climbed from bed. He put on his slippers and robe, and followed Charlie to the backyard.

"See," Charlie said.

"Who is she?" asked Lou.

"How should I know?"

"You found her."

"Just because she was sitting in my chair doesn't mean I know the lady."

"What was she doing in your chair?"

"Just sitting there."

"How come she's on the grass?"

"She was in my seat, Lou!"

"So you shoved her off?"

"Certainly."

"That was crude, Charlie," Lou knelt down beside her. "Nicely dressed, isn't she?"

"Certainly better dressed than you left yours," Charlie said.

"I won't quibble with that." He tipped her head back and touched her bruised throat. "A nylon stocking," he said. "Maybe a scarf. Not my style at all."

"I haven't accused you of anything," Charlie protested.

"No, that's right. Thanks. You've gotta be wondering, though."

Charlie shrugged.

"You read my book, right?"

"Certainly."

In fact, Charlie had not read it. He hadn't read any book since *Silas Marner* in high school. But Lou was proud of *Choke 'em Till They Croak: The True Story of the Riverside Strangler in His Own Words*. He had every right to be proud: the book, written during his last two years in prison, had been a hardbound bestseller. The paperback rights went for \$800,000, and Ed Lentz was signed to play Lou in the Universal film.

"First," Lou said, "if she wasn't a blonde, I left her alone. Second, I took the clothes home to dress up my mannequins. Third, I didn't use no scarf, I used my thumbs. That's how come they called me Thumbs."

"Certainly, I know all that."

"Fourth, I didn't dump 'em in other people's backyards. That's rude. I left 'em on the freeway exits." He poked her with his foot. "Not my style at all."

"But the police?"

"Exactly. We've gotta get rid of her."

"What'll we do with her?" Charlie asked.

"What we won't do, we won't dump her at no freeway exit."

"Of course not."

Lou pulled a cigar out of his robe pocket. He peeled off the wrapper and tossed it onto the grass. He poked the cigar in his mouth,

and lit it. "What we'll do," he said "we'll deposit her at the bank."

They stored her in the trunk of Charlie's Dodge, and went out together. Charlie, a former wheel man who drove getaway cars during numerous successful robberies and one failure, stole a Ford Mustang from the parking lot of an apartment building in Studio City. Lou followed him in the Dodge. On a dark, curving road in the Hollywood Hills, Lou picked the lock of the Mustang's trunk. They transferred her into the trunk, and left the Mustang behind the Santa Monica office of Home Savings and Loan.

"That was certainly a chore," Charlie complained afterwards.

"I got a kick out of it," Lou said.

Two days later, while reading the morning paper, Lou announced, "They found our body."

"Oh?"

"Dancer found slain, it says. The body of twenty-nine year old ballet dancer Marianne Tumly was found late Sunday night, the apparent victim of strangulation. Miss Tumly, understudy of Los Angeles ballerina Meg Fontana, disappeared Friday night after the company's performance of Swan Lake. Her body was discovered in the trunk of a car parked in Santa Monica, according to police officials." Lou began to mumble, apparently finding little worth sharing.

"You don't suppose they'll

connect us, do you?" Charlie asked.

"Not a chance."

FOR SEVERAL DAYS, Charlie drank his morning coffee in the backyard, enjoying the fresh air, the sunlight, the silence and peaceful solitude. On Saturday, however, he found the body of a lean brunette occupying his chair.

He stared at her. She stared back.

"This is ridiculous," he said. "Well, you're not going to ruin my day *this time!*"

But she did.

Though Charlie sat in Lou's wicker chair, back turned so she was out of sight, he could almost feel her staring at the back of his head. Irritated, he went inside to refill his mug. As he poured steaming coffee from the percolator, he got an idea. He went to the linen closet. Before resuming his seat, he covered the woman's head with a striped pillow case.

That almost worked. Unfortunately, Charlie half expected her to peek from under the pillow case. Every few seconds, he looked over his shoulder to check. It finally became too much for him. He rushed into the house, and barged into Lou's bedroom. "Lou!" he cried, "there's another one!"

Lou's scowl turned to a grin. "A busy man, our strangler."

Late that night, they put her in the trunk of a stolen Firebird.

They left the Firebird in a parking lot at Los Angeles International Airport.

Though the newspaper ran stories for several days about the missing dancer — another member of the troupe performing *Swan Lake* — her body wasn't found until Thursday night. It made the Friday morning paper.

After reading the article aloud, Lou lit a cigar. "We did real good on that one, Charlie. If we'd wrapped her up better, she might've gone another week. Know what I'd like to do, I'd like to put the next one ... "

"What next one?" Charlie demanded.

"We've had these gals two Saturday mornings in a row. Number three's gonna pop up tomorrow, you can bet on it."

"Lou!"

"Huh?"

"Let's lay for the strangler. If he comes along tonight with another corpse, we'll nab him!"

"What then?"

"We'll make him take it away."

Lou watched his smoke float toward the ceiling. Then he said, "Good idea. Excellent idea. I'd like to meet the guy."

CHARLIE, SITTING on a stool near the backyard fence at midnight, heard a car in the alley. It stopped just on the other side of the fence. He heard the engine die, then the quiet bump of a closing door.

So this is how he does it, Charlie thought. Just drives up the alley and brings her in. But the rear gate? It's always locked. How ... ?

Behind Charlie, something thudded against the redwood fence. He turned and looked up. A blonde woman grinned at him over the top. He heard a grunt. The woman seemed to leap. She towered over him for a moment, then folded at the waist. Charlie jumped out of the way. He gaped at her. She hung there, swaying slightly, like the body of an outlaw draped over a saddle. Another grunt came from behind the fence. Her legs flipped high, slender and pale in the moonlight. Then she dived to the grass. She performed a somersault, and lay still.

Charlie glanced toward the garage. Its side door stood open. In the darkness of its gap, he saw the red glow of Lou's cigar. He motioned frantically for Lou to join him.

Quickly, he crouched at the corner of the fence. The wood jolted against his back, and he saw an arm hook over the top rail. After a gasp and a scuffling sound, a leg appeared. Then, in one quick motion, the man swung over and dropped to the grass. He landed silently on his feet, less than a yard from Charlie.

Crouching, he lifted the body. He flung it over his shoulder.

"Now," said Charlie, "you may kindly toss her back over the fence

and take her away. Clutter someone else's yard."

Still holding the body, he turned to Charlie and said, "Huh?"

"I said take her away!"

"How come?" he asked. He was younger than Charlie had imagined. His shaved head was shiny in the moonlight. In his tight T-shirt and jeans, his stocky body looked dangerous.

"Because," Charlie answered in a subdued voice, "You've been putting her in *my* lawn chair."

"I thought you liked it."

"*Liked it?*"

"Sure."

Charlie was relieved to see Lou ambling toward them, puffing vigorously on his cigar.

"You took good care of 'em," the younger man continued. "You know?"

"Why'd you bring 'em here?" Lou asked.

The man spun around. Charlie dodged the woman's left heel.

"Did you know about me?" Lou asked. "Is that it?"

"Know what?"

"I'm Thumbs O'Brien. The Riverside Strangler."

"No fooling?"

"Did you read my book, kid?" Lou's voice was eager.

"What book?"

"Never mind." Lou sounded disappointed. "So how come you're leaving stiffs in our backyard?"

"Like I was telling this guy, you took good care of 'em. I mean,

the first, I was bringing her up through the alley here. It's dark, you know? So I just heaved her over the fence."

"How did she get in my chair?" Charlie asked.

"I got to thinking, you know? How comfortable can it be on the grass? So I hustled her over to the chair."

"Decent of you," Lou said.

"You guys took care of her real good."

"Thank you," Lou said.

"That's why I came back. I figured I'll let you take care of the others."

"Tell me this," Lou said. "Why'd you do it?"

"I just told you, you took real good..."

"He means," Charlie explained, "why did you kill them?"

"Oh." He grinned. "She told me to."

"Who did?"

"Isadora."

"Who?" asked Lou.

"Isadora Duncan. You know, Isadora! She wants 'em for her dance troupe."

Lou tapped a column of ash from the tip of his cigar. "They won't do her much good dead."

Charlie groaned at Lou's display of ignorance. "She's dead," he explained. "Isadora is. Her scarf caught in the wheel of her car. A long time ago. In the twenties, I believe."

"No kidding?" Lou nodded at the young strangler. "So you're

fixing her up with a bunch of dancers. I get it."

"May I ask," Charlie inquired, "how large a group she requires?"

"Oh big. Real big."

"How big?"

"Fifty-two."

Charlie imagined fifty-two more bodies in the backyard on his lawn chair. "I won't have it! Lou!"

"Afraid that's too much, kid."

"Too much?"

"Yeah. Sorry."

Charlie watched the woman fall. He watched the brief struggle. It was no contest, really. The kid didn't have a scarf, but Lou still had his thumbs.

ON A SUNNY, COOL MORNING toward the end of the week, Charlie carried his coffee mug outside and stopped in surprise.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

Lou, in sunglasses and a Dodger ballcap, was sitting on his own lawn chair. A cigar tilted upward from his mouth. His legs were crossed. Propped against his upraised right knee, he held a spiral notebook. "How's this sound?" he asked. *"Save Your Last Dance for Me: the True Story of the Swan Lake Strangler in His Own Words."*

"It sounds like a lie," Charlie said.

"You gotta take liberties," said Lou, "when you're a ghost-writer."

Changes

by Pauline C. Smith

Joe liked to travel, and wherever he traveled there was Marilyn, waiting for him, ready to make his life more pleasant than she had the last time.

JOE, A BIG YOUNG MAN with white teeth, short hair and steady eyes, inspired such confidence in employers that he could get a job anywhere any time. This ability caused within him an understandable restlessness — for it's good in one town, who knows? it might be better in the next. Thus, he often changed towns it was so easy to change jobs.

What actually appealed to him in Marilyn, although he wasn't truly aware of it, was her stability; he admired her "stay-putness," as he termed her settled habit patterns, a kind of sinking one's roots — a type of satisfactory serenity ... he watched her in the small city park for several days before he approached her.

She arrived at precisely ten minutes after twelve each week-

day lunch hour, sat at the very end of the same bench, took from her brown paper bag one waxed-paper-wrapped sandwich, ate it primly and precisely, scattered the crumbs for the squirrels, ants or whatever, ate one toll-house cookie, unwrapped so that it would stay crisp, sat in quiet contemplation, and at ten minutes to one, she rose, placed her folded empty brown paper bag in the waste can and walked across the street to a building marked *Kimball Building*, which housed a warren of offices.

Once Joe followed her into the foyer and watched her enter the elevator along with a number of other workers, and stared at the floor numbers as the arrow moved, stopped, moved and stopped again — at the fourth floor, the

sixth and seventh. He searched the business board and floor numbers and came up with the conjecture that she could work for an insurance company, a lawyer, or a direct mail outfit. He was correct. She worked for a direct mail outfit on the sixth floor.

What really attracted him about Marilyn were her shoulders. He had heard of leg men and breast men only to discover that he was neither. He was a shoulder man, and Marilyn's shoulders were thin, narrow and vulnerable — he wanted to hold them caressingly in his two big hands, tell them not to care, that they were no longer alone now, they had him and his hands.

No one ever accompanied her to the park during her lunch hours. She was a loner.

At first, when he got the job at the auto repair shop a couple of blocks down, he ate his lunch in one of the short order joints and wandered over to the park for a breath of fresh air before going back to work. But after seeing Marilyn on her particular portion of her particular bench each day, as sure as taxes and as sure as death, he ordered a hamburger to go and because of his white teeth, short hair and steady eyes, he got the hamburger in nothing flat and was privileged to watch her cross the street from the Kimball Building and seat herself on the end of the bench. He saw her arrival and her departure, from

the beginning to the end, the same each weekday, so he approached her at last — not boldly, but with hesitance and a shy and provocative smile ...

Girls reacted to him precisely as did potential employers — with complete faith — the white teeth, short hair, steady eyes, plus a shy smile proved an irresistible combination.

"My name is Joe," he announced, occupying the other end of the bench and casting the last of his hamburger to the squirrels. "I've noticed you," he said, watching her shoulders fold like wings. "You work in the Kimball Building, and you eat lunch here everyday."

It took awhile, but it worked out. He told her how he felt about her shoulders, and he told the tale delicately and so enchantingly that she felt a great gratitude to be loved for her narrow shoulders; and said it was his short hair, steadfast eyes and the shy smile that made her know he was honest, a man to be trusted.

So they shacked up together and were happy for six months.

It was, truly, an ideal situation.

Marilyn loved order and security. The nesting instinct was great within her because she had never had a nest of her own, so she set about making curtains, slipcovers and casseroles; she ironed the sheets and set the table with real cloth napkins! Joe loved it. It was a house-playing game just as

his job was a job-playing game. He loved it for six months.

And then he read an article about Salt Lake City, Utah. "Did you know," he said, "that there's a lake with salt in it?"

"You mean an ocean," she said.

"No. A lake."

"For heaven's sake."

"I think I'd like to go there. I've never seen a salt lake."

"I haven't either. But then, I've never seen a desert or a mountain or a gold mine, and I don't really care."

The itch, once it had started, kept nagging at him — not, necessarily, to see a salt lake, only to see something different from what he was seeing at present.

"We've got this nice apartment," Marilyn objected, "with new curtains and slipcovers." Her thin little shoulders hunched and drew together as if to protect her lifestyle and habit pattern. "I've got a good job and so have you."

Joe knew that. And it wasn't a salt lake that beckoned, but something different — a change from what he now had. He tried to explain, but Marilyn tightened her shoulder muscles and talked about security and constancy, all of which worried Joe because he admired security and liked this serene young lady with her vulnerable shoulders and constant sameness, but there was a whole world out there filled with jobs

wherever he might choose to land and he became nervous with the desire to be free to go, and testy with wanting to retain the restraint of Marilyn.

Had anyone suggested Joe might have a temper that could explode with provocation, he would have smiled shyly while rumpling his crewcut with big fingers and brushed off the suggestion with the statement that he was the easiest-going guy going, which would have been the truth, but only because things had always gone along with him, a job wherever and whenever he wanted it and a dame he could leave as easily as the job. This was something else. This time he wanted to take the woman with him — new place, new job, but with Marilyn along, forming the roots of a foot-loose existence with her ironed sheets and cloth napkins.

This he wanted, and he couldn't make her understand.

He worked on her. He brought out his smile and said okay, she could bring along the curtains, her slipcovers and her ironing board. He wanted her, didn't she understand that? He just didn't want her here! He was tired of here. He wanted someplace else, but with her in it.

No. She could not understand. They had a nice apartment and a couple of good jobs, so what was wrong with *here*?

He argued with increasing vehemence, explaining to her how

he was ... she argued passively and told him how *she* was ... The argument continued over cloth napkins at the table and ironed sheets in the bed, and it ended the night they drove away from the supermarket, the back of the car filled with grocery sacks.

"You went to a different supermarket," she complained. "I couldn't find things and they didn't stock the brands I'm used to."

"I wanted to show you what it was like to try something new."

"I didn't like it," she said.

"Now, I'm driving home a different way."

"I don't like this either," she said. He was driving through a tract of new homes under construction. The 2x4 studs lifted their arms into the moonlit sky like pleading skeletons ... "I dislike new stores, new routes, new things," she continued. "They frighten me. They upset me. I like the old order ... "

... At which point Joe stopped the car, leaned toward her and, wrapping his strong fingers around her neck, pressed tightly until the narrow shoulders drooped and relaxed into death.

He opened the door, let her roll from the car and ready to weep but not weeping yet for he had not the time, he drove to the apartment, packed his clothes and took off, west and south, toward Salt Lake City, because that is what he had been talking about — it had been

the subject of their debate — Stupid broad — why did she need to iron the sheets in one place rather than another?

He used up the groceries (from the sacks in the back of the car) in motel apartment kitchens, missing the cloth napkins, the casseroles and Marilyn. He had not, as yet, reached Salt Lake City when he felt the need of a job and transient security and stopped in a middling sized town, got a job in the first auto repair shop he hit, and went to work.

It was good — a good town, a good job. It did not seem really good to Joe until he saw the girl in the city park sitting alone on a bench and knew immediately that she was Marilyn whom he had not killed after all, for here she was, on a bench as usual.

He spoke, not using her name, but looking at her small-winged shoulders, so vulnerable and so waiting. He did not use her name for three days, then when he called her Marilyn, she said her name was Marcia and she worked on the assembly line at an aircraft factory. He went along with her story, not believing a word of it.

She had changed since he'd almost killed her or killed her and she'd come back to life — not her shoulders, they were the same thin pointed wings, and not her fundamental nature which was stable and settled; it was her habits that showed a different pattern, subtle changes to throw him

off, of course — how she ate a half sandwich with two cookies for lunch and folded her lunch sack and put it in her pocket book to be used again — little things so he'd think she was someone else, this Marcia, another woman who would go with him when he wanted to go.

The nesting instinct, he discovered when they shacked up, was as pronounced as ever only it was revealed in different ways. Where Marilyn had ironed the sheets and used cloth napkins at the table, Marcia (as she preferred to be called) washed down the walls and waxed the linoleum.

They had a good six months together, sleeping on unironed sheets and using paper napkins at the table (actually they could have eaten off the kitchen floor or even the walls, she kept them so very clean), when one night they caught a TV program over their color set that described Las Vegas ... "Hey," said Joe, "that's a place I haven't been ..."

"So," said Marilyn and/or Marcia, raising her eyes from her HOME SWEET HOME cross-stitch sampler, "So what?"

"So let's go. You could get an assembly line job in nothing flat and I could get a job as a mechanic." He jumped up, ready to take off, but she, without missing a stitch, answered that she was satisfied — why go somewhere else when here was just about right?

He left her and her thin little shoulders resting against her brightly waxed linoleum and again headed south and west, weeping all the way.

He did not reach his planned destination; instead, he stopped off in a fair-sized city and got himself a job and found a park and there in the park was the girl on the bench with small wing-like shoulders.

He could not believe his eyes.

"Marilyn," he cried. She shook her head. "Marcia?" he asked.

"My name is Mildred," she said.

But she couldn't fool him. He knew who she was, even though she had changed again — he noticed that the very first day as he watched her eat her fruit salad lunch from a mayonnaise jar and rinse the jar out at the drinking fountain when she had finished, and wrap it up in the brown paper sack to use the next day.

The changes, as well as the basic similarities, became apparent once they shacked up together ... Mildred never touched iron to sheet or laid a cloth napkin on the table, not did she wash a wall or wax a floor — what she did was shampoo carpets, polish furniture, bake bread and work on needlepoint chair seats ...

This time, Joe bet with a shy smile and steadfast gaze, this time she'd learned her lesson and she'd pick up and go with him when he was ready to go.

Tickets For The Game

by Dick Stodghill

Sure I wanted tickets for the big game, but I couldn't guess the deadly price that had to be paid for them!

I WAS DRINKING COFFEE at the diner out on the bypass, thinking how warm it was for mid-November and wishing I had tickets for the big game that afternoon. It was out of the question, though. Both Purdue and Indiana had had good seasons so tickets were scarce and the only way to get into Ross-Ade Stadium was to pay scalpers' prices. That's why it was

out of the question as far as I was concerned.

I was on the end stool, the one just before the curve in the counter. A weary looking man, red-eyed and unshaven, came in and took the first stool beyond the curve so we were sitting half facing each other. He ordered coffee, too, and while waiting for it took a narrow envelope from his

pocket and began tapping it on the counter.

The Purdue logo was on the upper left corner and I knew by the shape that it contained tickets for the game. I looked up from it to his face, wondered about his haggard appearance and decided he must have arrived the night before and indulged in a little too much pre-game hilarity.

That's one of the ironies of life; a lot of people inside any football stadium have so much under their belts they don't know what's happening down on the field while outside are thousands of guys like me who would give their eyeteeth to see the game.

He turned his head a little and caught me staring at him. Maybe he had seen me looking at the envelope earlier because he said, "Could you use a couple of tickets to the game today?"

The question was unexpected and I had to grope around for the right answer. Sure, I could use them. The problem was I couldn't pay for them. It must have been written all over my face because he said, "They're yours for the taking if you want them. No charge, I'm not going to be using them."

I was thrilled, naturally, but at the same time a little embarrassed so I said, "Gee, I really appreciate it," and it came out sounding like something a high school kid would say after asking for his first date and being accepted.

His coffee had arrived by then and he sipped it, staring over the top of his cup with a far-away look. When he put it down he said, "It'll be the first IU-Purdue game I've missed since the war."

I still had that uneasy, self-conscious feeling you get when a stranger gives you something that way so the high school kid was talking again when I said, "Gosh, that's too bad. If you think there's some way you might get out —"

He shook me off. "No, I won't be using them. You see, Ginny — that's my wife — and I were going like we always do. I was going to meet her here in Lafayette this morning but —" His voice trailed off and he picked up his cup again. I didn't say anything so after a few seconds he went on:

"Ginny and I got married right after I got back from the war. We met at IU and seemed to hit it off right away. That would have been the fall of '42 because I went in the army the following summer. She waited for me, though. I knew she would; she wasn't one of those out-of-sight-out-of-mind kind of girls.

"That was funny, too, because I've never been much to look at, but Ginny's always been a knock-out. Never lost her looks. Guys ten, even fifteen years younger, always have had an eye for her, but she's been a one-man woman.

"That last night before I left for the army we sat up all night on a bench there on campus. We didn't

say much — hell, there wasn't much you *could* say — but along toward morning when it first started to get light off the east I told her to go ahead and have fun and if somebody else came along, well, not to worry about me.

"She cut me off, put a finger on my lips and said, 'I told you I'll be waiting. Now hush.'"

He looked at me then so I nodded my head to show I'd been listening and said, "You were lucky. A lot of them said that but didn't mean it."

He smiled kind of to himself and drank more coffee. "That's right," he said, "I was lucky. I've always known that, believe me."

I was still ill at ease, wondering what he was leading up to, sort of expecting it to be that she had been in an accident or something like that. He was lost in thought for a minute or two but then looked at me and said, "You don't mind my talking to you, do you?"

What could I say? It was bothering me, sure, but you don't accept a favor from someone and then turn around and be rude. I shook my head and said, "No, of course not."

He smiled to himself again, lit a cigaret and said, "We've never been like some married couples, each going their own way, know what I mean? Ginny and I have always done things together like football games, things like that. You know how some women are, never interested in the same thing

their husband is. Not Ginny, she's always wanted to go along no matter where I was going.

"Maybe that's because she's always been alone a lot. I'm a salesman, usually leave on Monday morning and don't get home again until Friday night. We don't have kids; Ginny always wanted them but she had a miscarriage the year after we were married and the doctor told her that was it. Neither one of us has much in the way of a family, either, so she's had to spend a lot of time by herself. I suppose that's made us even closer, is one reason it's always been so great that we get along like we have.

"I know it's been tough on her, having me on the road so much. We've got a nice big yard, though — we live just outside of Indianapolis — and she enjoys working around the place when the weather's good and then in winter she reads a lot. I always call home either Tuesday or Wednesday night and we talk for fifteen, twenty minutes. Sometimes half an hour. It gets a little expensive but it breaks up the week, makes it go by a lot faster."

I realized he was talking about her in the present tense and figured I had been wrong and maybe she was just sick or something. I was hoping so for his sake and mine, too. It's funny how sometimes you know a person just wants to talk, but it isn't really you he's talking to; you just happen to

be there. It's awkward, hearing intimate things about someone else's life that you don't want to hear but have no choice. I don't handle situations like that too well. The only thing I can think of to do is to change the subject, but they always go right back to it.

He nodded his head and said, "Yeah, Ginny's been looking forward to it but —" He lit another cigaret, finished his coffee and went on: "I was working up along the lake this week. Started in Sheboygan on Monday and worked my way back through Milwaukee and Racine. Then next Monday I'd go back up to Kenosha and work down to Chicago. Any-way, we decided that since I'd have to go right by Lafayette on my way home it would be fun to make a long weekend of it and meet here last night.

"I made reservations at the motel across the street for Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights. That way Ginny could drive up, bring me fresh clothes for next week, and we could have dinner and a few drinks Friday night, take in the game on Saturday and then just relax, do whatever we felt like on Sunday. Monday morning I'd start out from here and Ginny would drive back home.

"Well, wouldn't you know that of all weeks it would be this one when I got tied up with a good customer and was going to have to see him again the first thing this morning when his partner would

be back in town and could okay a contract. That hasn't happened in years. Anyway, it would still give me time to get down here for the game so I called Ginny at noon yesterday and told her how things stood but to come up just like we planned and I'd meet her as soon as I could get away.

"Well, it turned out the partner took a Friday evening flight, so the three of us got together at the airport at nine o'clock and had everything taken care of in a few minutes. On the way back to the motel I decided to drive on down right away instead of waiting till morning so I checked out and was on my way before ten.

"It was late when I got here, of course, so I went to the desk, found out what room Ginny was in and got a key. I guess she had been over in the lounge and had one too many. Anyway, she was asleep like I knew she would be. Kind of passed out, really."

He stopped talking, lit another cigaret and stared off into space. That went on for a few minutes and I would just as soon have gotten up and walked away but I knew I couldn't do that. Finally, figuring it was best to get it over with, I said, "Was anything wrong?"

He gave me a real funny look and then kind of smiled a little. "Yeah," he said at last. "There was a guy with her. A young guy, probably about thirty. Like I said, she had way too much to drink and

I don't know if she even knew the guy was there. Besides, I guess it wasn't right, walking in on her that way, but I never thought a thing about it."

There was a long silence, one of those you have to experience yourself because it can't be described. I just stared down at my empty cup. I could tell he was looking straight ahead, probably not even aware I was still there.

It seemed like that silence lasted for hours. It really might have if it depended on me to make the first move, but suddenly he dropped the envelope in front of me, laid his hand on my arm and said, "Well, I have to be getting back. Hope you enjoy the game."

I WANTED TO THANK HIM again, but by the time I could get my tongue untied he was on his way out the door. I turned and watched him go, but he only went as far as the phone booth out by the highway. It was a long call, must have lasted at least five minutes. When he finally hung up, he went across the road into one of the ground-level rooms at the motel. I ordered another cup of coffee and switched over to the stool where he had been sitting so I could look out the window without having to turn around.

After a few minutes a police car pulled into the motel lot. I had a real funny feeling, almost like I was sick, when I saw it. The two policemen just had time to get

out when another cruiser arrived and then an unmarked car with two men in street clothes who you could pick out a mile away as detectives.

One of the men in uniform tried the door that the man who gave me the tickets had gone in not more than five minutes earlier. It wouldn't open so he kind of trotted down to the office and came back with a key. They all went inside but after a minute or so three of the men in uniform came out and two of them drove away in one of the cruisers. The other stayed by the door.

A few more minutes went by and then another unmarked car pulled up and the two detectives in it went inside carrying a camera and some other equipment. Then another man arrived, one with a black bag like doctors used to carry when they made house calls.

Nothing more happened for about fifteen minutes, but then an ambulance came and right behind it was a second one. By then a crowd had gathered and people in the diner were standing up, looking out, I really felt sick, didn't want to look any more but couldn't help myself.

I guess someone was standing in front of me when the ambulance crews went inside because I didn't see them but pretty soon two men came out carrying a stretcher that was covered with a sheet. Then the second crew also came out carrying a covered stretcher. In

the meantime the first two men had gone back inside and before long they came back with another load. That made three. Ginny, her husband and the other man.

I sat there for quite awhile, feeling pretty bad, blaming myself about the man. When he talked to me, it would have been too late to do anything about the others but I couldn't shake the idea that I should have helped him some way. Finally I realized that was crazy. I had no idea what he had already done so how could I have guessed what he planned to do when he got back to the motel?

When I looked at my watch it was getting on toward noon so I got up and went out to the phone booth, the same one the man had

used to call the police. That got me wondering how he had done it, knowing they would get there within a few minutes. I pushed the thought out of my mind because I really didn't want to know.

I started to dial Bill's number since we always go to games together but hung up halfway through and started over only this time dialing my own number. When my wife answered I said, "Honey, get your jacket and wait at the door for me. I'll pick you up in a few minutes, we're going to the game."

She was kind of surprised. It was the first one I had taken her to for a long time. It was silly, I suppose, but I thought the man would have liked that. I did, too, ●

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAKERS *continued from page 104*

MacDonald. Thirty years old, I'm married to a freelance writer. I'm also the father of a three-year-old daughter named Katie and the owner of a Siamese cat. I sold my first mystery story in 1976, and since then I've become addicted to writing within the crime/suspense framework. Whatever time I can spare from teaching, writing, and family concerns, I devote to restoring antique furniture and playing golf.

PAULINE SMITH tell us: For the last three years I have been working on novels and teaching a college writing course. However, the short mystery fiction field is my love, and former MSMM stories have appeared in several BEST DETECTIVE STORIES OF THE YEAR as well as on their Honor Roll, one of which was filmed by the American Film Institute.

We've got a tight issue this trip, with no room for letters. Sorry. Maybe next time. Meanwhile, there's some good reading here. Don't say I didn't tell you.

— CEF

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BOOK REVIEWS

by JOHN BALL

A good deal of publicity effort has been put into *The Glow*, by "Brooks Stanwood," actually the writing team of Howard and Susan Kaminsky. It's a horror story whose two best features are the New York City background and the business of jogging which fills so many of its almost 300 pages. Otherwise, despite some very deft writing, the reader's interest is likely to sag during the overlong build-up which fills the first 250 pages. Praise be to the Kaminskys the clues are all there even if widely spaced. The idea used is not new, but appears in a 20th Century adaptation. To give away the ending would be unthinkable, but it must be said that *The Glow* is at least a distant cousin to a very famous horror classic that is more or less retold here against a fresh background. (McGraw Hill, \$9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Very readable is *Ransom Town* by Peter Alding. This is a fine, fast moving police procedural with a British background. Arson is the crime, with a whole city held

hostage under the threat of increasingly severe fires until a huge ransom has been paid. When a child becomes an accidental arson fire victim, Detective Inspector Robert Fusil and his associates launch an all-out effort to put a stop to the terror and to arrest those responsible. It's a sweeping idea, but the author carries it off with real distinction. As some others have done, he slides from home a little at the finish; otherwise this is a masterful job. Very definitely recommended. (Walker, \$7.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Two Grand Masters show how it is done with two new books. The first of these is *The Homicidal Horse* by Hugh Pentecost. A new sports complex with full horse racing facilities is the background of this story which takes off immediately and never lets up until the swift and satisfactory ending. Public relations man Julian Quist stars as a man who becomes involved because a close friend loses his fiancee under very suspicious circumstances. Dick

Francis is the most distinguished specialist in the horse racing background crime novel, but he doesn't have a monopoly, as Mr. Pentecost demonstrates here. The slightly overdrawn villain isn't too hard to spot, but the story will hold your interest all the way. (Dodd Mead, \$7.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

The second new work by a Grand Master (A title conferred by the Mystery Writers of America) is *Mugger's Day* by George Bagby (Aaron Marc Stein). The author is always good, but he outdoes himself here, despite the fact that not once does sore-footed Inspector Schmidt take his shoes off. The background is excellent, particularly Dinah's restaurant and the tenements where so much of the action takes place. The theme of the phantom killer is handled superbly here and the tenement dwellers live and breathe on every page. The best Bagby possible in years, and that is saying a lot. (Doubleday Crime Club, \$7.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Walker and Co. deserves the sincere gratitude of every mystery reader for reprinting the nine crime novels of the late Edmund Crispin. The second of these highly literate works to appear is *Holy Disorders*. Again Oxford don Gervase Fen intrudes himself and generally raises cain while surrounding himself with a barrage

of classical references, not all of which will be familiar to the reader. Missing are the zany situations that crop up in most of the Crispin books; instead he has given us a tightly reasoned, fairly clued classic mystery in the old tradition. Incidentally, a method of murder used here is, to the best of our knowledge, unique in the literature. It is as good, in its way, as Dorothy Sayers' famous demise technique in *The Nine Tailors*. If you miss any of Walker's Crispin reprints, you have only yourself to blame. (Walker and Co., \$9.95)

☆ ☆ ☆

Since this column began, we have had several requests for information on books about mysteries. Here is a fast rundown. The accepted classic is *Murder for Pleasure* by Howard Haycraft. Originally published in 1941, it is still deservedly in print; an enlarged edition can be had from Biblo and Tannen or in any of the mystery specialist book stores such as *Murder, Ink* and *The Scene of the Crime. Mortal Consequences* by Julian Symons is a fine history of the literature, published in 1972 by Harper and Row in this country. *The Encyclopedia of Mystery and Detection* by Chris Steinbrunner and Otto Penzler is a major work that belongs in every mystery library. The publisher is McGraw Hill, and it's \$19.95 well spent. *The*

Murder Book by Tage La Cour and Harald Mogensen is an illustrated history of the detective story that must be rated a brilliant and fascinating piece of work. Herder and Herder publish it at \$9.95.

Jacques Barzun and Wendell Hertig Taylor have co-authored *A Catalogue of Crime* which they call "A reader's guide to the literature of mystery, detection, and related genres. This 750-page volume contains the authors' opinions on thousands of published mysteries. This is largely a reference work, but it can still hold your attention by the hour once you settle down with it. (Harper and Row, \$18.95)

A scholarly study is *The World of the Thriller* by Ralph Harper; Case Western University Press is the source. *The Detective Story* by Saul Schwartz is essentially a text book at the high school level, but it is very well done as an introduction to the field with many short works included.

A major work is *The Mystery Story* by 13 noted authors including Phyllis A. Whitney, James Sandoe, Michael Gilbert, Hillary Waugh, Aaron Marc Stein and Francis M. Nevins, among others. Obtainable from the Extension Division, University of California, La Jolla, California 92093. A pioneer work *Who Done It?* by Ordean A. Hagen has been completely superceded by the monumental *Bibliography of*

Crime Fiction 1949-1975. Also published by the University of California Mystery Library program, this huge piece of scholarship took ten years to prepare. The author, Allen J. Hubin, is also the editor of *The Armchair Detective*, a splendid quarterly dedicated to mystery literature (available from The Mysterious Press 129 West 56th Street, New York N.Y. 10019) The Bibliography lists all known adult crime fiction in the English language, hard and soft cover, also lists by title, and by central character. To the serious mystery collector, and to every library in which mystery literature figures, this is an essential volume. (The Mystery Library, Extension Division, University of California, La Jolla, California 02093, \$60.00)



A final footnote: crime readers interested in the life of crime reporter Dorothy Kilgallen will be glad to know there is a new biography of the much publicized lady. The unresolved circumstances of her mysterious death are well covered by her biographer, Lee Israel. Kilgallen, it may be recalled, had an exclusive interview with Jack Ruby, but was dead before she could publish the results. A great deal of the background of her era is included. (Delacorte, \$12.95)

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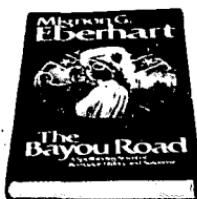
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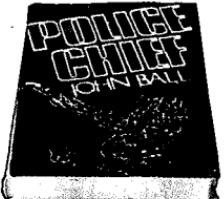
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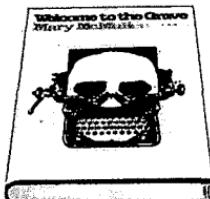
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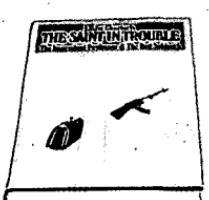
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